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DISCOURSES

(IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

UPON

The Whole Scriptures.

110974

BY

THE REV. C. SIMEON, M.A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

B. C

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CONTENTS.

VOL. V.

Skeleton		Page
441.	*Benefits of true Wisdom*	1
442.	*Confidence in God encouraged*	6
443.	*The Pleasantness of Religion*	11
444.	*Keeping the Heart*	17
445.	*Sinner's Retrospect*	23
446.	*The captivating Power of Sin*	27
447.	*The Sluggard reproved*	31
448.	*Love to the Holy Scriptures inculcated*	36
449.	*Address preparatory to Confirmation*	41
450.	*Wisdom's Address to Men*	44
451.	*The Value of true Wisdom*	51
452.	*Effects of Sloth and Diligence compared*	55
453.	*Portion of the Wicked and the Righteous contrasted,*	58
454.	*The Folly of making a Mock at Sin*	62
455.	*Misconceptions about the Way of Salvation*	67
456.	*The Vanity of Carnal Mirth*	73
457.	*The Upright alone acceptable to God*	77
458.	*Man's Estimate of himself, and God's, contrasted,*	82

Skeleton		Page
459.	*Erroneous Views of Religion refuted*	88
460.	*God is the Disposer of all Events*	99
461.	*The Name of the Lord a strong Tower* . . .	102
462.	*A wounded Spirit*	106
463.	*True Piety is rare*	111
464.	*No absolute Perfection here below*	116
465.	*The Duty of giving the Heart to God*	120
466.	*The Folly of vain Excuses*	123
467.	*The Sluggard's Vineyard*	126
468.	*Returning Good for Evil*	130
469.	*True Repentance recommended*	135
470.	*Danger of Obstinacy in Sin*	140
471.	*Agur's Wish*	145
472.	*The Self-Deceiver exposed*	148
473.	*The Usefulness of Schools of Industry*	152
474.	*The Creature is Vanity and Vexation*	156
475.	*Duty of paying our Vows*	161
476.	*Earnestness in Religion recommended*	167
477.	*Wisdom notionally approved, but practically disregarded*	172
478.	*Youth warned of the future Judgment*	178
479.	*Remembering God in our Youth*	182
480.	*The Sum of all true Religion*	188
481.	*The Church's Love to Christ*	192
482.	*The Church's Fellowship with Christ*	198
483.	*Perseverance crowned with Success*	204
484.	*Spiritual Sloth reproved*	210

Skeleton		Page
485.	*Transcendent Excellencies of Christ*	215
486.	*The Church's Desire of Christ's Love*	219
487.	*God's Complaint against his People*	222
488.	*The Sinfulness and Incorrigibleness of the Nation,*	227
489.	*The Service which alone is pleasing to God* . .	229
490.	*Exhortation to a Holy Walk*	234
491.	*Isaiah's Vision of Christ*	238
492.	*Blessings imparted by the Gospel*	243
493.	*Pride and Downfall of the Assyrian Monarch.* .	247
494.	*The Wells of Salvation*	254
495.	*The Believer's Song*	258
496.	*The Christian Warfare*	263
497.	*Immutability of God's Counsels*	268
498.	*God's Church and People Secure*	273
499.	*Trust in God recommended*	278
500.	*Conversion of the Jews gradual*	284
501.	*The Gospel a Source of Blessings to Mankind* .	292
502.	*The Work of Righteousness is Peace*	297
503.	*Protection promised to the Godly*	303
504.	*Glorious Prospects of the Gospel Church* . . .	307
505.	*The Way to Zion*	312
506.	*Help for us in God*	318
507.	*Forgiveness known and enjoyed*	322
508.	*Christ's Care for his Sheep*	326
509.	*The weak Believer comforted*	330
510.	*The Worm Jacob threshing the Mountains* . . .	335
511.	*Christ's Commission*	339

Skeleton		Page
512.	*The Saints are Witnesses for God*	342
513.	*God's Kindness to his People*	346
514.	*The Out-pouring of the Spirit promised*	351
515.	*The Folly of Spiritual Idolatry*	357
516.	*Redemption a Ground of Joy*	363
517.	*God's Care for his People*	368
518.	*God's tender Concern for his People*	373
519.	*God will not forget his People*	378
520.	*Promised Increase of the Church*	385
521.	*Desponding Fears removed*	391
522.	*Messiah's Sufferings and Supports*	396
523.	*A Dissuasive from the Fear of Man*	400
524.	*God's Faithfulness to his Covenant Engagements,*	404
525.	*Peace the Fruit of Divine Teaching*	410
526.	*Christ a Witness and Commander*	416
527.	*Encouragement to turn to God*	420
528.	*Resemblance of the Gospel to Rain and Snow*	424
529.	*Acceptance for all sincere Worshippers*	427
530.	*The Services which God requires*	432
531.	*Observance of the Sabbath enjoined*	436
532.	*The Righteous a Prey to the Wicked*	442
533.	*The Means of Spiritual Victory*	448
534.	*Millennial Piety described*	452
535.	*Excellency of the Church of Christ*	457
536.	*Blessedness of the Lord's People*	463
537.	*The Believer clad with the Garments of Salvation,*	467
538.	*The Duty of interceding for the Church of God,*	472

Skeleton		Page
539.	*Restoration of the Jews*	476
540.	*Messiah's Triumphs*	481
541.	*The Loving-kindness of the Lord*	486
542.	*The Love of God towards his People*	491
543.	*Imperfection of our best Services*	493
544.	*Danger of disregarding God*	496
545.	*God delights to comfort his People*	500
546.	*The Jews to convert the Gentiles*	507

CCCCXLI.

BENEFITS OF TRUE WISDOM.

Prov. ii. 10—12. *When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee; to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths: to deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God: for her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life; that thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it: but the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.*

WHETHER we regard Solomon as a saint walking with his God, or as a backslider restored to God, we must consider him as pre-eminently qualified to give advice for the regulation of our conduct: for, as a saint, he was endued with wisdom above all the children of men; and, as a backslider, he had a wider range for his wickedness, and a deeper experience of its folly, than any other person ever possessed.

Under the character of "wisdom" he here speaks of true religion; which he recommends to all, but

especially to persons in early life; and, in order to impress his advice the more deeply on our minds, he sets before us,

I. The benefits derived from true wisdom—

When once religion is deeply rooted in the heart, it will render us the most essential services—

1. It will keep us from the society of ungodly men—

[There are many whose delight is in wickedness: they have departed from God themselves, and have "made crooked paths for themselves;" in which they proceed with all imaginable "frowardness" and perverseness. Disdaining to receive any light from God or his word, they "walk in utter darkness, not at all knowing whither they go[a]." And not content with casting off all restraint themselves, and walking after their own lusts in all manner of uncleanness, they wish to draw all they can along with them: they deride all serious piety, and labour to the uttermost to turn aside from the way of godliness any who may be inclined to it[b]———"They rejoice to do evil:" and, if they can but succeed in their efforts to ensnare a person who has been fleeing from sin, and to divert him from following after God, not even Satan himself will exult more than they———

Now from such companions true religion will preserve us. We shall see at once how far they are from God, and how impossible it is to be happy in their society: "for what fellowship can righteousness have with unrighteousness; or light with darkness; or Christ with Belial; or he that believeth with an unbeliever[c]"? Instead of seeking their society therefore, we shall "come out from among them, and be separate[d];" and not have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them[e]"———]

2. It will keep us from the snares also of ungodly women—

[It is lamentable to think how degraded human nature is, and how assimilated to the very beasts multitudes are, who were originally formed in the image of their God. Females, married, as well as unmarried, "forsaking the guide of their youth and the covenant of their God," will abandon themselves to the most vicious courses, soliciting the embrace of men to whom they are utter "strangers," and practising every species of artifice, to ensnare and vitiate all who come in their way———

And

[a] ver. 13. with 1 John ii. 11. [b] 1 Pet. iv. 4.
[c] 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15. [d] ib. ver. 17. [e] Eph. v. 11.

And such is their influence over those whom they have once ensnared, that it is a miracle almost if even one is recovered to a sense of his duty, and is brought back again in penitential sorrow to his God[f]. Truly their ways lead down to death and to hell[g]; for not only do they draw men from all thoughtfulness about their souls, but they bring them into extravagances and crimes, which not unfrequently issue in suicide, or death by the hands of the public executioner.

But from these also will vital piety preserve us. It will lead us to use all the precautions against them, that a prudent Government employs against the infection of the plague. We shall have no communication with persons, whose very presence will endanger the life of our souls. We shall not go near their houses, or the places of their resort[h]. We shall not parley with temptation when it comes in our way; but shall flee from it, as Joseph did, saying, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God[i]?" ———]

3. It will guide us in the paths of righteousness and peace—

[When once true religion enters into the soul, we shall take the Scriptures for our guide, and endeavour to walk in the paths which all the holy men of old have trod before us[k]. We shall not be satisfied with following the customs of those around us, or with conforming to the standard of duty which the world approves; we shall desire to be "holy, as God is holy;" and shall determine through grace to "perfect holiness in the fear of God" ———]

Such being the effects of true wisdom, I will proceed to point out to you,

II. The vast importance of seeking after it—

Both the promises and threatenings of the Mosaic law were chiefly of a temporal nature; the people who served God faithfully being encouraged to expect peace and plenty in the land of Canaan; whilst those who were disobedient to his laws were to be visited with war, famine, pestilence, and ultimately to be driven out of that land, as the Canaanites had been before them. But under these figures truths of far higher moment were veiled: and the present and eternal states of men were shadowed forth as indissolubly connected with their moral and religious character. Hence the contrast drawn between the sentence

[f] ver. 19. [g] Prov. v. 3—5. and vii. 26, 27.
[h] Prov. v. 8. [i] Gen. xxxix. 9. [k] ver. 20.

sentence accorded to "the upright" and "the wicked" in the concluding verses of our text, must be understood as referring to their respective states,

1. In this world—

["Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come[l]." Certainly *in this world* is there an immense "difference between those who serve God, and those who serve him not[m]." We readily grant that the ungodly and profane may prosper in respect of outward things, and that the saints may be in a state of degradation and oppression[n]: but there is no comparison between the real happiness of the one and of the other: the ungodly are "like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt[o]:" they are agitated by many ungovernable and conflicting passions: their tempers are a source of continual disquietude[p]: and they have no inward resources to calm the tumult of their minds———But the godly have consolations peculiar to themselves, and abundantly sufficient to counter-balance their afflictions. They have a God to go unto; a God, who says, "Cast thy burthen on the Lord, and he will sustain thee." The very tribulations which they endure for righteousness sake, are to them a ground of glorying[q]: and the light of God's countenance lifted up upon them fills their souls with joy and peace, even with "a joy that is unspeakable," and "a peace that passeth all understanding."

If then we look no further than to this present life, we do not hesitate to declare, that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding[r]."]

2. In the world to come—

["There is a Rest which remaineth for the people of God[s];" a rest, into which the true Joshua shall introduce them, as soon as ever they shall have completed the period fixed for their abode in this dreary wilderness: and there shall they "remain" for ever: there shall they be as "pillars in the temple of their God, and shall go no more out[t]." But how shall I represent their happiness in that place where there will be no remains of those evils which they experienced in this world[u]; and where every blessing which they here sought for shall be imparted to the utmost extent of their desires, and of their capacities for enjoyment[x]———

On the other hand, there is a day of retribution for the ungodly, when they shall not only be "convinced of all their ungodly

[l] 1 Tim. iv. 8.
[m] Mal. iii. 18.
[n] Psal. lxxiii. 3—10.
[o] Isai. lvii. 20, 21.
[p] Rom. iii. 16, 17.
[q] Rom. v. 3.
[r] Job xxviii. 28.
[s] Heb. iv. 9.
[t] ver. 21, with Rev. iii. 12.
[u] Rev. xxi. 4.
[x] Psal. xvi. 11.

ungodly deeds which they have ungodlily committed, and of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against the Lord and his ways, but will have judgment executed upon them" by the Judge of quick and dead[y]. And what words can ever suffice to give an adequate idea of their misery, when, driven from the presence of their God, and from the congregation of his saints[z], they shall be consigned to those regions of misery, where they will take their portion in "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," and "dwell for ever with everlasting burnings?"———

If men would but reflect one moment on these consequences of their impiety, there would be no longer any occasion to descant on the wisdom of seeking after God, or the folly of provoking his displeasure by a life of sin.]

Let us LEARN then,

1. To form a right estimate of religion—

[Religion is wisdom, even though the whole world should combine to call it folly ———]

2. To seek it in due measure—

[To receive it into *the head* is to little purpose: the proper seat of it is *the heart*. Nor is it sufficient that we yield a constrained obedience to it: its service should in our estimation be accounted perfect freedom. It is only "when wisdom *enters into our heart*, and knowledge *is pleasant to our soul*," that we can be said to have received the grace of God in truth. The wordly man is at home in the world: it is his element wherein he moves. And such must religion be to the Child of God, his rest, his element, his delight———]

3. To let it have its full operation on our souls—

[Wherever true wisdom is, there will be "*discretion* to preserve us, and *understanding* to keep us[zz]." *We conceive this observation to be deserving of peculiar attention;* because the indiscretions of religious people are rarely traced to their proper source, a want of right dispositions in the heart. Where meekness, and modesty, and diffidence, and humility reside in the heart, there will be a corresponding propriety of conduct in the life: but where pride, and conceit, and forwardness, and self-will are predominant, there will the deportment savour of these hateful qualities in all our intercourse with mankind. There is this remarkable difference between human wisdom and that which is divine: human wisdom leaves the heart untouched, or even administers fuel to its corruptions: but divine wisdom "pours the very soul into the mould of the Gospel[a]," and assimilates all its dispositions to the image of

[y] Jude 15.
[z] Ps. i. 5. Luke xiii. 28.
[a] Rom. vi. 17. the Greek.
[zz] Prov. ii. 11.

of God himself. It was not Paul's eminence in intellectual attainments that made him so eminent in Christian tempers: it was the abundance of his grace that rendered him so fruitful in every good word and work: and, if the grace of God abound in us, we also shall proportionably adorn the Gospel in the whole of our life and conversation. Let that then be remembered which Solomon has told us, "I wisdom dwell with prudence[b]:" and let us be careful that we do not by any indiscreet conduct give "occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." Our determination, through grace, must be, to cut off from the world all unnecessary occasion of offence. We must not imagine that our separation from an ungodly world gives us a license to violate either the duties or the charities of life; but, whilst we "abstain from all appearance of evil," we must cultivate to the uttermost not only "whatsoever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure, but whatsoever things are lovely and of good report[c]." We must labour to "behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way[d]."]

[b] Prov. viii. 12. [c] Phil. iv. 8. [d] Ps. ci. 2.

CCCCXLII.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD ENCOURAGED.

Prov. iii. 5, 6. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him; and he shall direct thy paths.*

THE book of Proverbs is not so much designed to open to us the way of salvation, as it is to regulate our conduct after we have attained the knowledge of the truth. It abounds with maxims admirably calculated to assist us in our intercourse with men, and with instructions also relative to our walk before God. Of this latter kind is the advice given us in the words which we have just read; wherein we see,

I. The confidence which God requires of us—

As creatures, we are of necessity dependent on Him who first gave us our existence; for in him we live, and move, and have our being. But it is by no means sufficient for us to acknowledge this as a truth which we cannot controvert: we must acquiesce in it as a state that we approve, and glory in it as our

our highest privilege. Our confidence in God must be co-extensive with our necessities: it must be—

1. Entire—

[We must trust in the Lord "with all our heart." There must be no aversion to such an appointment as unnecessary, no distrust of it as insufficient. We should view ourselves as utterly incapable of insuring our own happiness; and we should regard God as engaged to order every thing for our good. We should not for a moment doubt his wisdom to discern what shall eventually prove best for us, nor his power to execute it, however great or numerous the difficulties may be which appear to obstruct its accomplishment. Nay, we must be persuaded, that his love delights in caring for us, and that his truth and faithfulness will perform all that in his unbounded mercy he has undertaken in our behalf. From this conviction we must commit all our concerns to him, to be ordered and overruled as he in his infinite wisdom shall see best. There must be an actual transfer of them (if we may so speak) into his hands, and a full conviction of mind that he is able to keep, and will assuredly keep, what we have so committed to him, so as to bring all our affairs to a blessed and successful issue[a].]

2. Exclusive—

[We must "not lean to our own understanding," so as to rely on it for any thing. We are to *use* our understanding indeed, but not to transfer to it any measure of that dependence which should be placed on God only. We know not what would be the ultimate issue of any one thing. We are ready to suppose, that whatever obstructs our wishes for a time, will endanger their final accomplishment: whereas God often makes those very events subservient to his own gracious purposes, and uses them as means whereby his ends shall be fulfilled. This was remarkably the case with Joseph, in all his trials: and there is no true Believer who will not acknowledge, that in his own experience many things which have been desired by him would have proved injurious, and many things which have been deprecated by him have been overruled for his welfare. From a full conviction that "a man's way is not in himself, and that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps[b]," we must renounce all idea of planning for ourselves, any further than in an entire dependence on the Divine guidance and direction. We are doubtless to use all proper means for attaining what on the whole appears most desirable: but *the relying on* our own devices, as calculated of themselves to insure success, is the thing which God has marked with his

[a] Ps. xxxvii. 5. with 2 Tim. i. 12. [b] Jer. x. 23.

his strongest disapprobation[c]——The doing of this demonstrates our folly[d], and exposes us to the heaviest curse[e]. We must therefore altogether "cease from our own wisdom[f]."]

3. Uniform—

["In all our ways we must acknowledge him;" not in those only which seem to be of greater importance, but in all without exception. It is not in the rise and fall of empires only that God's hand is to be viewed, but in the falling of a sparrow, or in any event equally insignificant. We are apt to consider some things as important, and others as unimportant; but the truth is, that in God's sight nothing is important (except as it may advance his glory); nor is there any thing unimportant as it relates to us. Many things which in their effects and consequences have been of the greatest imaginable importance, may in their origin be traced to the slightest possible occurrence. If we look into the book of Esther, we shall see this observation confirmed in its utmost extent. Nor is God to be acknowledged only in those events which would be deemed small, but in those also which are casual, or, as we call them, accidental: "the lot (than which nothing is more casual) is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord." In every thing therefore, whether great or small, painful or pleasant, concerted or fortuitous, God must be acknowledged as having sent it, if past, and as having the entire disposal of it, if future.]

To place this entire confidence in God will be found our truest wisdom, if we consider,

II. The encouragement he gives us to trust in him—

Wonderful is the promise here given for our encouragement; "He will direct our paths." But how will he direct us? Will he speak to us in dreams, or visions, or by Urim and Thummim, or by an audible voice? Or will he go before us in the pillar and the cloud, as he did before his people in the wilderness; or answer us, as he did David, in reference to the men of Keilah, and the Amalekites[ff]? No: we are not authorized to expect any thing of the kind: yet will he direct us sufficiently to preserve us from any material error,

1. By his Spirit—

[To "open the eyes of our understanding" is one of the most

[c] Isai. xxii. 8—11. See also Isai. xxx. 1—3. and xxxi. 1—3
[d] Prov. xxviii. 26. [e] Jer. xvii. 5, 6. [f] Prov. xxiii. 4.
[ff] 1 Sam. xxiii. 4, 11, 12, and xxx. 8.

most important offices of the Spirit: and, in doing this, he will purge away from our eyes that film, which obstructs our sight. Pride, passion, interest, and a thousand other things, incapacitate us for a clear and perfect discovery of our duty: and, till these be mortified, we are constantly exposed to the most awful delusions: we are ready at all times to "call good evil, and evil good; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness." But, when our minds are duly enlightened, we see things in their proper colours. On different occasions, when the Apostles would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village, and when they contended with each other who should be the greatest, our blessed Lord instructed them better: and so will he do with us, bringing to our remembrance some portion of God's word which bears upon the point in hand. Thus he fulfils that blessed promise, "that we shall hear a word behind us, saying, This is the way; walk ye in it; when we should otherwise have turned either to the right hand or to the left[g]." We say not, that the Holy Spirit does not sometimes effect this *without the word*: we are inclined to think he does; and *that* too by a kind of impression on the mind deterring us from evil and guiding us to good[h]: but he never does it *contrary to the word*. Suffice it to say, that whether with or without the word, he will guide us into all truth, so far as shall be necessary for the rectifying of our views, and the regulating of our conduct.]

2. By his Providence—

[God often interposes, for men in a most wonderful manner, to preserve them from evil, and to guide them into that which is good. Even a wicked Balaam was obstructed in his way by God's appointment, in order to awaken him to a just sense of his duty. A remarkable instance of such an interposition occurs in the life of David. He, being incensed against Nabal for the contemptuous manner in which he had treated his messengers, and for his ungrateful refusal to administer to his necessities[i], had determined to avenge himself upon him and all that belonged to him. But God put it into the heart of Abigail to go to meet him, and by mild representations to pacify his wrath[k]. Thus were the greatest impieties prevented through the intervention of this prudent female[l]. And in this way God often directs the ways of his people, either sending a friend perhaps, or a Minister, to suggest such considerations as shall influence their minds; or by some particular occurrence "raising, as it were, a hedge, or building a wall," to keep them in the path of duty[m]. It may be, that the occurrence may occasion much grief at the time: but God

[g] Isai. xxx. 21.
[h] Ps lxxiii. 24. 1 John ii. 20, 27.
[i] 1 Sam. xxv. 4—11.
[k] ib. ver. 18—31.
[l] ib. ver. 32—34.
[m] Hos. ii. 6, 7.

God knows how to accomplish his own purposes, and will constrain us all in due time to acknowledge that "he doeth all things well."]

We will ADD a few words,

1. To direct your exertions—

[Do not imagine that confidence in God is to supersede your own personal exertions. You are to labour, as much as if every thing depended on yourselves; and then to trust in God, as if nothing had been done by you. You must also expressly commit your concerns to God in fervent and continual prayer. The Psalmist particularly combines this with confidence in God: "Trust in God at all times, ye people; pour out your hearts before him[n]." The confidence that is unaccompanied with prayer and diligence is mere presumption. We have a beautiful pattern in Jacob, when he was about to meet his brother Esau. He disposed every thing in a way most suited to pacify his brother's anger, or, in the event of not succeeding in that attempt, to secure that part of his family who were most dear to him: but, whilst he acted thus, he committed himself wholly to the Lord, and looked for success from him alone[o]. Thus let there be no want of prudence or of diligence on your part; and then you may be assured that God will not suffer you to be disappointed of your hope.]

2. To regulate your expectations—

[Though God promises to direct your paths, he will not so direct you as to keep you from every degree of error. The Apostles themselves, though in what they declared to be the will of God they were inspired to utter nothing but what was true, were not infallible in their own personal conduct. Peter greatly erred on one occasion, in his conduct towards the Gentiles; as Paul also did in reviling God's high priest. You must not therefore conceive that you are *certainly* and *altogether* right, because you have prayed to God for direction: God may have many wise and gracious purposes to answer by leaving you still under some measure of darkness and ignorance: if it be only to humble you still more, and to shew you the blindness of your minds and the deceitfulness of your hearts, it is a good and gracious end, for which you will in the issue see reason to be thankful. Be modest then, and diffident in your conclusions: and instead of assuming infallibility to yourselves, be always ready to suspect that your way is still far from perfect; and to the latest hour of your lives be praying to God to lead you in a right path, and to fulfil to you that gracious promise, "The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."]

[n] Ps. lxii. 8. [o] Gen. xxxii. 9—32.

CCCCXLIII.

THE PLEASANTNESS OF RELIGION.

Prov. iii. 17. *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

TO be sincerely and eminently religious is considered by the world as a symptom of weakness and folly. But the Scriptures represent such a life as characteristic of true wisdom. Upon such "wisdom" Solomon bestows the highest commendations[a]: he speaks of it as incomparably more precious than gold, or rubies, or any earthly good whatever: he paints her as a queen disposing of riches, honour, and longevity to all her subjects: and, because we are more captivated by the idea of pleasure than of any thing else, he commends her to us in the text as productive of it in the highest possible degree.

We are naturally led to shew from the words before us, that the duties of religion are,

I. Pleasant in their exercise—

In confirmation of this truth let us consider religion,

1. In a general and comprehensive view—

[Religion, as our Lord informs us, is comprehended in two things; the love of God, and the love of our neighbour.

Let us then inquire into the love of God. Suppose a person filled with admiration of the Divine perfections as exhibited in the works of creation, must not that be a *pleasant* exercise of mind? Suppose him rising yet higher to the works of Redemption, and contemplating the justice and the mercy, the truth and the love, the wisdom and the goodness of the Deity, as united, and harmonizing, and glorified in the cross of Christ; suppose him, I say, contemplating these with rapture, till he burst forth in songs of praise similar to those uttered by the angels at the birth of Christ, or those which are now sung around the throne of God; would there be no *pleasure* in such an employment? Suppose him yet further meditating upon the mercies of God vouchsafed to himself in particular, and adoring the tri-une God for all the wonders of electing, redeeming, sanctifying grace; must not such a frame be *pleasant?*

Inquire, next, into the love of our neighbour: suppose one to

[a] ver. 13—16. That this is the true meaning of "wisdom" and "understanding," is evident from Job xxviii. 28.

to be exercising all those dispositions towards him which his relation to us or his situation demand: suppose one to be rejoicing with him in his prosperity, or to be weeping over his adversity in tender sympathy; suppose one to be stretching out the hand of charity for his relief, or administering consolation for his support;—is there no *pleasure* in all this? Surely he has not the heart of a man, who can question this obvious, indubitable truth.]

2. In its most difficult and painful duties—

[*Repentance* is a principal duty of religion: but can we find, it may be asked, any pleasure in that? We answer, Yes: only view repentance in its proper light, and we will affirm that it is pleasant. Suppose that one of us had by mistake swallowed somewhat that was poisonous; that we felt the deadly venom preying on our vitals; and that our medical attendant informed us, that, unless removed from our stomach, the poison would destroy us in a few hours; should we deem the exertions necessary for the removal of it a painful task? Should we not gladly renew them, till we had accomplished our end? Should we not, instead of regretting the pain occasioned by them, feel thankful that we had an opportunity to use them? And would not the success that accompanied our efforts turn our pain into a pleasure? Such then is repentance; it is a painful exertion to get rid of sin, which, if not expelled from our hearts, will utterly and eternally destroy us: and, though we do not say that pain can ever be pleasure, yet we affirm, that the very pangs of contrition, *considered in a complex view*, as consonant with our wishes and conducive to our good, are really pleasant: and for the truth of our assertion we will appeal to all who ever experienced those pangs: we will ask whether the seasons of their deepest humiliation have not been the sweetest seasons of their lives? We fear no contradiction upon this point, unless from those who are wholly ignorant of the matter.

Self-denial is another, and a very important, duty. But this, it should seem, precludes, in the very nature of it, the idea of pleasure, because it is a thwarting of our own inclinations. We must however include this also among the ways that are ways of pleasantness. That the gratifying of a corrupt inclination is pleasant to flesh and blood, we cannot deny: but that the mortifying of it is abundantly more pleasant, we do not hesitate to affirm. Suppose a person tempted to yield to the solicitations of lust, or to gratify a no less keen appetite for revenge; would not a victory over his evil passions afford him more pleasure than a compliance with them? would not the mortifying of an unchaste desire be attended with a pleasure more pure and refined than could be attained by the indulgence of it? And, granting that the overcoming of evil with

evil

evil would be pleasant, (for revenge, they say, is sweet,) would not the "overcoming it with good" afford him incomparably sublimer happiness[b]? Let us illustrate each of these positions by an example. Joseph, we know, resisted the importunity of his mistress: but were his sensations less pleasing when he had got out of the reach of temptation, than they would have been if he had consented to her wishes? David, when enraged at the ingratitude and insolence of Nabal, went to avenge himself by his destruction: but when stopped and pacified by Abigail, did he regret the loss of any satisfaction which he would have felt in executing his cruel designs? No: he blessed her, and blessed God for her; and found infinitely more delight in the exercise of a forgiving spirit than the completest revenge could ever have afforded him[c]. We maintain it then, that the self-denial which religion calls for, is a source of real pleasure to the soul.

The bearing of the cross is another duty inculcated on all the followers of Christ[d]. And can this be pleasant? Yes, we must affirm that this also is a source of pleasure to the true Christian. Doubtless the contempt and hatred which we must expect from an ungodly world are not pleasant *in themselves:* to be shut up in prison, and scourged, and put to a cruel and lingering death, are not pleasant *in themselves*: but, *as endured for the sake of Christ*, they are pleasant. To ascertain this, inquire of those "who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods[e];" or those who, with their feet in the stocks and their backs torn with scourges, "sang praises to God at midnight[f];" or those who, after their imprisonment, "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ[g]." Ask what our Lord meant, when he taught his followers to "rejoice and be exceeding glad," whenever they should be called to suffer[h]? and inquire of all the primitive saints who had learned, through grace, to "glory in tribulation[i]." Inquire of him, who suffered more than any other of the Apostles, and who, speaking of his expected martyrdom, exults in it as a matter of the warmest congratulation[k]. The experience of all true Christians is the same at this day: they "count themselves happy when they are called to endure[l];" and look upon it as a special honour conferred upon them, when "it is given them to suffer any thing for their Redeemer's sake[m]." In a word, religion raises us so much above earthly pains and pleasures, as to render us altogether independent on them for our happiness[mm].

Seeing

[b] Rom. xii. 21. [c] 1 Sam. xxv. 31—33.
[d] Luke ix. 23. 2 Tim. iii. 12. [e] Heb. x. 34.
[f] Acts xvi. 23—25. [g] Acts v. 41. [h] Matt. v. 11, 12.
[i] Rom. v. 3. [k] Phil. ii. 17, 18. [l] Jam. i. 2. & v. 11.
[m] Phil. i. 29. [mm] Hab. iii. 17, 18.

Seeing then that even the most painful duties of religion are sources of pleasure, we may confidently affirm the same respecting "*all*" her ways.]

To this blessed account of wisdom's ways, we may add, that they are,

II. Peaceful in their issue—

Mark the influences of religion on all who walk in her ways: mark them,

1. In life—

[None know any thing of "peace," except the true Christian. As God has said, so experience proves, that "there is no peace to the wicked[n]." The cisterns to which they go for refreshment, are polluted; or rather, they are "broken cisterns that can hold no water[o]." All that they possess is mere "vanity and vexation of spirit." "Even in laughter their heart is sorrowful; and the end of their mirth is heaviness[p]." But is it thus with the true Christian? Has not he peace in his soul, and "joys, with which the stranger intermeddleth not[q]?" Yes, he "has already entered into rest[r]:" he has a tranquillity arising from the subjugation of his passions: he has a holy composure of mind springing from the testimony of a good conscience[s]: he has many sweet manifestations of God's love to his soul: he has that within him which mitigates every sorrow, enhances every enjoyment, and supplies his every want. In a word, from committing his soul, and all his concerns, to God, he has "a peace that passeth all understanding." This peace, we say, flows from the very exercises of religion, and is, more or less, an inseparable attendant on them. To this effect the inspired writers uniformly speak. The Psalmist observes, "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them[t]." To the same purpose Isaiah also says, "The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever[u]:" and St. Paul confirms their testimony, saying, "To be carnally-minded is death; but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace[x]."]

2. In death—

[Even in the time of health the ungodly cannot bear to think of death: conversation upon that awful subject is irksome and disgusting to them: they avoid it, because it makes them melancholy. If they be attacked with any fatal disease, their friends do all that they can to abate their fears, and to hide

[n] Isai. lvii. 21. [o] Jer. ii. 13. [p] Eccl. ii. 2. Prov. xiv. 13.
[q] Prov. xiv. 10. [r] Heb. iv. 3. [s] 2 Cor. i. 12.
[t] Ps. cxix. 165. [u] Isai. xxxii. 17. [x] Rom. viii. 6.

hide from them the real state of their disorder. When at last they come to feel their danger, then they are full of alarm and terror; and, however much they despised the duties of religion before, will begin to pay attention to them. There are some indeed so blinded by their own delusions, that they believe themselves safe; while others are so callous as to be altogether insensible of their awful condition. But, if men are not wholly blinded by conceit, or hardened by wickedness, they cannot but tremble at the approach of death: and then the hopes which they once fondly entertained, give way to painful forebodings, even to "a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." On the contrary, he who hath walked in wisdom's ways, is enabled in the midst of life to look forward to death, (like a bridegroom to his approaching nuptials,) as to the period, when all his desires shall be fulfilled, and his joys consummated. As he beholds death approaching, he rather chides its tardiness, than deprecates its advent. He "knows in whom he has believed;" and, in the hour of his departure, commits his soul with confidence into the hands of his ever-living and adorable Redeemer. Thus Stephen[y], thus Paul[z], and innumerable others, have died; and David tells us, that it is the privilege of all to expect and enjoy such a death as this: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace[a]."]

3. In eternity—

[As soon as the ungodly enter into the eternal world, whether they were conceited or callous, whether confident or trembling, they know the truth of all that God's word had declared. The rich man that fared sumptuously no sooner breathed out his soul, than he understood and felt the evil of neglecting his eternal interests: he then found his misery irremediable, and incapable of the smallest alleviation. He knew his five surviving brethren were living in the same thoughtless way, and hastening to the same fatal end; and wished that they might be apprised of their danger, ere it were too late: he knew by bitter experience that to those who lived and died in sin, nothing remained but unintermitted everlasting misery; "they drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have *no rest* day nor night[b]." How different is the state of true Christians! They enjoy "the rest which here remained for them;" they rest in the bosom of their Saviour, free from all sin and temptation, from pain and weariness. The peace which they enjoyed in this world, was but

[y] Acts vii. 59, 60. [z] 2 Tim. iv. 6—8. [a] Ps. xxxvii. 37.
[b] Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

but a taste of that banquet on which they feast continually, a drop of "those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore."]

ADDRESS,

1. The votaries of pleasure—

[There are two fatal mistakes under which you labour: the one is, that you think religion (according to the Scriptural representation of it, will afford nothing but pain; the other is, that it will consist with an enjoyment of all the pleasures of the world. With respect to the former of these, we hope that nothing need be added to what has been already spoken; we hope that religion, if it have a dark and gloomy side, has also, like the pillar and cloud, a bright and cheering aspect: it is only on God's enemies that it casts a gloom: to his friends it affords a cheering light, a refreshing shade, a sure and safe directory to heaven. With respect to the latter idea, namely, that of its countenancing worldly pleasures, surely no one can deliberately put such a construction on our text. If religion's ways be pleasant, must therefore pleasure's ways be religion? If so, what can be meant by St. Paul, when he says, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth[c]?" What could St. John mean, when he said, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him[d]?" And what could our Lord mean, when he said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world[e]?" Be not deceived, as though carnal and worldly pleasures were the only sources of enjoyment; but be assured, that the renunciation of them will contribute more to your happiness than the indulgence; and that real pleasure is to be found in God alone.]

2. The disciples of Christ—

[The wicked know that you profess to find more pleasure in religion than they can obtain in the world: give them not then any reason to think that you are disappointed in your expectations. If they see you lukewarm in religion, will they not conclude that it has not charms sufficient to allure you, or benefits sufficient to reward your labour? And if they see you joining in their company and vain pursuits, will they not, however they may encourage you in such a conduct, suppose that religion is not able to make you happy, and that you are forced, after all your professions, to come and borrow of their carnal pleasures, in order to eke out the scanty pittance that religion has bestowed? O bring not such disgrace upon your holy profession. Shew that you despise the vanities of this world, and that you have no appetite for husks after living

[c] 1 Tim. v. 6. [d] 1 John iii. 15, 16. [e] John xvii. 16.

living upon "the bread that is in your Father's house." Our Lord has said, "My yoke is easy, and my burthen is light;" shew therefore that you feel it so; and let it be seen by your zeal in religious duties, that they are not a weariness to you, but a delight. Thus will you recommend to others the paths you tread, and prove to them that "your feet are guided into the way of peace."]

CCCCXLIV.

KEEPING THE HEART.

Prov. iv. 23. *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*

IT is certainly of infinite importance that we be deeply convinced of our utter inability to do any thing that is good, and of our entire dependence upon God for the effectual aids of his Holy Spirit. But we must not imagine, that, because we have no sufficiency of ourselves to do the will of God, we are not bound in duty to do it, or not to be exhorted and stimulated to the performance of it. Our duty is the same, whatever be the circumstances to which we have reduced ourselves; and it is *in*, and *by*, our personal exertions, that God has promised to "work all our works in us." Hence, in the Scriptures of Truth, we are continually exhorted to serve our God in the way of his commandments. It is obvious that we cannot preserve the life of our bodies for one single moment; yet God expects, that we keep ourselves from those things which would destroy life, and use all proper means of preserving it: so neither can we, of ourselves, preserve the life of our souls; yet are we bound to "keep our heart with all diligence; since out of it are the issues of life."

It is indeed supposed here, that a new heart has been given to us; because from the unregenerated heart no good thing can issue: but inasmuch as even the renewed heart has still innumerable corruptions within it, we must keep it with all diligence.

To impress this duty on our minds, let us consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

"To keep the heart" is indeed an arduous task.

To assist you in the performance of it, we will offer such suggestions as appear suitable to the occasion:

1. Fortify it with good principles—

[A city unfortified is open to assault on every side: and so is the heart, if not duly fortified by the principles of true religion. As a sinner redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and sanctified by his Spirit, I am the Lord's peculiar property: I live by him; and I must live for him: "having been bought with a price, I am not my own, but his" who bought me: and I have nothing to do but to "glorify him with my body and my spirit, which are his." When therefore any thing attempts to gain possession of my heart, I must keep it for him; for him wholly; for him alone. Nothing is to break in upon this principle. Let earth and hell assault me, I must oppose them in this impregnable bulwark; "Depart from me, ye evil-doers; I will keep the commandments of my God[a]." God has furnished the Christian with armour. for this contest[b]; and, clothed in this panoply, he must maintain the conflict even unto death[c].]

2. Watch all its most secret motions—

[A citadel, however strong, if filled with traitors waiting for an occasion to open it to the enemy, need to be guarded with peculiar care: the professed defenders of it must themselves be watched. So it is with the heart, notwithstanding it be at present garrisoned for the Lord. It is inconceivably difficult in many instances to distinguish between the loyal and the treacherous. They are both habited in the same uniform; and both make the very same professions: both too appear actuated by the same holy zeal. The Apostles, when disputing with each other who should be the greatest, and forbidding others to cast out devils, because they followed not with them, and desiring to call fire from heaven to avenge their Master's cause, appeared as faithful as men could be[d]: yet were they in reality actuated by pride and envy, in the garb of zeal and love: and, had not these corrupt passions been checked at first, who can tell, "how great a matter this little fire might have kindled[e]?" There is not a motion of the heart but must be strictly marked: its associates must be carefully noticed; its tendencies examined; its professions scrutinized; lest Satan himself be found there, under the semblance of an angel of light[f].]

3. Combine all its energies in the service of your God—

[The

[a] Ps. cxix. 115. [b] Eph. vi. 11—16. [c] Rev. ii. 10.
[d] Luke ix. 46; 49, 54. [e] Jam. iii. 5. [f] 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14.

[The Psalmist has a remarkable expression on this subject; "Unite my heart, O Lord, to fear thy name[g]." If the powers of the soul be scattered, they will be as inefficient as soldiers that are dispersed. It is by a combination of efforts for a pre-concerted end, and by simultaneous movements for its accomplishment, that success is attained. The various powers of the soul must act in unison: the understanding, the will, the affections, the memory, the conscience, must all have the same object in view, each defending its proper post to the uttermost, and ready to succour the other with all its might. If, whilst the understanding is occupied about spiritual and heavenly things, the will and the affections are running after earthly and carnal things, what can be expected, but that the enemy shall soon gain undisguised and permanent possession of the soul? Every one knows, that "a house divided against itself, falleth;" and a divided heart must become a prey to the great adversary of God and man. All its powers must center in God, if God is to inhabit it as his temple, and to possess it as his inheritance.]

4. Call in for it the most effectual aid—

[Human efforts unassisted by God, will be of little avail. Indeed we can do nothing but as we are assisted by "the Captain of our Salvation[h]." To him then must we look to "strengthen us with might by his Spirit in our inward man[i]:" we must go forth against our enemies, as David did against Goliath, not in dependence on an arm of flesh, but in the name of the Lord God of Israel: we must "be strong in *the Lord*, and in the power of *his* might[k]." Then we may defy all our adversaries: we may boldly ask the greatest amongst them; "Who art thou, O thou great Mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." See how Paul taught the first Christians to triumph, whilst yet in the midst of all their conflicts: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: in all these things we are more than conquerors[l]:" so then may the weakest of us triumph, if we call in our blessed Lord to our aid: for "through Christ strengthening us, we can do all things[m]."]

But to form a right judgment of our duty, we must yet more distinctly notice,

II. The particular instruction relating to it—

We must keep our heart "*with all diligence*." Our attention to it must be,

1. Earnest—

[g] Ps. lxxxvi. 11. [h] John xv. 5. [i] Eph. iii. 16.
[k] Eph. vi. 10. [l] Rom. viii. 35, 37. [m] Phil. iv. 13.

1. Earnest—

[It is not a slight or superficial attention to it that will suffice. The work is too great to be effected in such a way. To keep the heart from sin amidst so many temptations on every side, and to keep it in the exercise of all holy and heavenly graces, from every one of which it is by nature alienated; *this* is a great work indeed, and requires the utmost possible exertion on our part. The metaphors by which the Christian's life is set forth, sufficiently shew what efforts are called for on our part. A race is not to be won without straining every nerve: an adversary, whether in fight or in wrestling, is not to be overcome without putting forth all our strength. Can we then suppose, that, when our contest is not with flesh and blood only, but with all the principalities and powers of hell, the victory can be gained without the most strenuous exertions? No; it cannot: and our Lord plainly tells us that it cannot: "*Strive*," says he, "to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall *seek* to enter in, and not be able." Know then, that whatever you have to do in the keeping of your heart, you must "do it with all your might."]

2. Constant—

[The work which we have to do, is not like that of a painter or a statuary, who may leave his work for a time, and find it afterwards in the state in which he left it: it is rather like that of one who is rolling up hill a stone, which will return upon him, as soon as ever he intermits his labour. Our hearts of themselves are "bent to backslide from God," ever ready to "start aside as a deceitful bow:" and Satan is ever on the watch to draw us aside. If he intermit his labours, it is in appearance only, and not in reality: for he is ever "going about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." His wiles and devices are innumerable: and, if once he can find us off our guard, he will assuredly avail himself of the occasion to deceive and, if possible, to destroy us. We therefore must be always "on our watch-tower," according to that direction of our blessed Lord, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation: and, what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."]

3. Persevering—

[There is no state at which we can arrive in this world that supersedes the necessity of continued vigilance and care. Were we as eminent as Paul himself, we must still, like him, "keep our body under and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, we ourselves become castaways." Let our circumstances be ever so favourable, we know not but that we shall fall the very next moment. Hezekiah was but just recovered from a dangerous illness, and *that* by miracle; yet when the Babylonish ambassadors came to offer him their master's congratulations, he fell, and offended God

God by "the pride of his heart[n]." Peter also was but just descended from Mount Tabor, where he had beheld his Lord transfigured, and shining forth in all his glory, when he acted Satan's part in dissuading his Lord from completing the work assigned him: so that he drew forth from his divine Master that just reprimand, "Get thee behind me, Satan[o]." We may add too, that there is no wickedness so great, but we may be drawn to the commission of it. Who can reflect on David's adultery and murder, or on Peter's denial of his Lord with oaths and curses, and not see reason to cry continually to God, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

Thus then we see, It is not enough to keep our hearts, but we must "keep them with all diligence," engaging in the work with earnestness, and maintaining it with constancy and perseverance to the latest hour of our lives.]

Let us now attend to,

III. The reason with which both the one and the other are enforced—

The heart may in some respects be considered as the seat of vitality in the human body, because from thence issues the blood that circulates through the whole frame. But still more may it be said of the heart in a spiritual view, that out of it are the issues of life. For,

1. It is the proper source of all evil—

[There are many evils to which our corrupt nature is apt to yield; some are spiritual, and some are fleshly; but the womb where all are generated, and from whence they proceed, is the heart. Adultery, and murder, and theft, with many other evils, might be supposed to arise rather out of external circumstances connected with our outward man: but they are all traced by our blessed Lord to the heart: "From within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within[p]." Now, if the heart be the fruitful spring of such evils, ought it not to be watched? ought it not to be kept with all diligence? It is evident that, without continual care, the whole man would soon be inundated with evil: should we not then watch the sluices? should we not guard the banks, and keep them in good repair? In other words, should we not do all in our power to prevent such fatal effects? Let it never be forgotten, that the smallest breach

[n] 2 Chron. xxxii. 24—26. [o] Matt. xvi. 23, 24.
[p] Mark vii. 21—23.

breach in a bank will soon yield to the torrent, and, by its extension, bid defiance to any remedy that can be applied: consequently, if we would not be overrun with *all manner* of evil, we must guard against the irruption of *any*. "A little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump."]

2. It is the proper seat of all good—

[Grace is planted in *the heart:* it has no other residence: it may operate by the members; but its seat is in the heart. *Repentance* flows from thence, even from "the broken and contrite heart. *Faith* has there its first formation; "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." *Love* combines and concentrates all its powers; "We are to love God with all the heart: yea, "*Christ himself* dwells in our hearts by faith." Whatever then proceeds not from the heart, is of no value: all our best services for God are no other than hypocrisy, if the heart be far from him[q]. Must we not then keep the heart with all diligence, to see that it be duly influenced by Divine grace, and that all which we do is the result of gracious principles implanted there? Truly, if "a man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, and, after all, be no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal," because his actions proceed not from a principle of love in the heart, we are called upon to watch over our hearts with all imaginable care, that they be duly stored with all that is good. This is the plain and obvious inference from what our Lord himself hath distinctly affirmed in those memorable words, "The evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil; and the good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good:" in both cases the produce is "from the abundance of the heart[r];" and "the tree is known by its fruits."]

3. By it shall our state be determined in the last day—

[Even in courts of judicature amongst ourselves, it is not so much the *act*, as the *heart*, that is the object of investigation. Murder itself is not accounted murder, if it was not attended with a purpose of heart to injure and destroy. Much more therefore may it be expected that God will inquire into the designs and purposes of our hearts: "He looketh not on the outward appearance, but at the heart:" and "he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins, on purpose to give to every man according to the fruit of his doings." For this end "he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart." To our hearts then must we look, if ever we would give up our account with joy: for, as our hearts are, so shall we appear in his sight[s]. Let us

[q] Matt. xv. 7, 8. [r] Luke vi. 45. [s] Prov. xxiii. 7.

us then not only search and try ourselves, but beg of God also to "search and try us, and to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting."]

APPLICATION—

1. Grudge not your labour in the way to heaven—

[You cannot make any attainments in this life without labour: how then can you hope to attain without it the glory and felicity of heaven? True it is, that heaven is a gift of God; a gift altogether of his free and sovereign grace: but it is also true, that we must labour for it, according to that direction of our Lord; "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you[t]." Labour then with all earnestness, and constancy, and perseverance. If you be frequently foiled, still return to your post, and increase your vigilance in proportion as you discover the deceitfulness and wickedness of your hearts: and be assured, that, however great your toil may be, heaven will be an abundant recompence for all.]

2. Doubt not but that your labour shall at last be crowned with success—

[Were your success dependent on an arm of flesh, you might well despond: but your God and Saviour is pledged to "carry on in you the work he has begun," and to "perfect that which concerneth you." Your enemies may renew their assaults as often as they will; but they shall not prevail: for God has said, that "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper[u]:" and again, "The law of God is in his heart; his footsteps shall not slide[x]." Go on then: "watch ye; stand fast in the faith; quit you like men, be strong[y]:" and know for your comfort what the all-gracious and unchanging God hath spoken; "Be not weary in well-doing; for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not[z]."]

[t] John vi. 27. [u] Isai. liv. 17. [x] Ps. xxxvii. 31.
[y] 1 Cor. xvi. 13. [z] Gal. vi. 9.

CCCCXLV.

SINNER'S RETROSPECT.

Prov. v. 12, 13. *How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!*

A TIME of reflection must come to all: if men shake off all thought till the hour of death, they will not

not be able to do so when once the soul is separated from the body: their ways will *then* be brought to remembrance; and all the powers of their minds be fixed upon the contemplation of them. Happily, with many this season arrives before it is too late: and, not unfrequently, the very enormities which have been committed are the means of exciting in the soul a salutary remorse. Sometimes the present consequences of sin press heavily upon the mind, and awaken the energies of a sleepy conscience. Thus Solomon supposes many to be affected after they have brought trouble on themselves by their licentious courses: and he urges this very consideration as an argument for guarding against all temptations to sin, that, however pleasurable a life of sin may be, the retrospect will be painful in the extreme; and the now thoughtless debauchee "will mourn at the last," in the review of the mercies he has abused, and will say, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!"

We shall not confine our attention to the particular subject treated of in the context, though in every congregation, it is to be feared, there are but too many to whom it would be applicable; but shall rather take occasion from our text to set before you in a more enlarged view,

I. The sinner's retrospect—

That we may bring home the subject to every man's bosom, we shall consider men under two distinct classes;

1. Those who already feel some painful consequences of their past conduct—

[Amongst these we must first notice the persons more immediately referred to in our text, namely, those who have wasted their property, and injured their constitution, in habits of criminal indulgence[a]. What reason for regret have they! How glad would they now be, if they had restrained their appetites, and not purchased a momentary gratification at so high a price!———Next to these we may mention the spendthrift, and the gamester, who through covetousness or the love of pleasure have dissipated their fortune, and involved themselves

[a] ver. 9—11.

selves in ruin. How common is it for persons so circumstanced to destroy their own lives, and to seek in suicide a remedy for the evils they have entailed upon themselves!——— To these we may add the persons who by any disgraceful act have blasted their reputation, and rendered themselves obnoxious to just reproach: to such the seasons of reflection are bitter. They attempt perhaps to divert their thoughts by business or pleasure; but they can never cease to rue the day in which they brought upon themselves so heavy a calamity. There are times when all who have entailed misery on themselves will bring to mind the instructions given them in early youth; and then they will, inwardly at least, complain, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!"]

2. Those who, though they feel no present pain arising from their sins, are yet sensible that they have not answered the great ends of life—

[The necessity of turning unto God, and the means of acceptance with God through the atonement of Christ, have been distinctly set forth from time to time; so that none who had diligently attended to the word that was preached to them, and "mixed faith with it," could have continued in the ways of sin and death. But how many are at this moment as far from God as they were years ago! How many have reason to regret that they have ever heard the Gospel, which, instead of being a savour of life to them, has, through their neglect of it, been made a savour of death unto death! Our blessed Lord told his hearers, that "if he had never come to instruct them, they would not, comparatively, have had sin; but that now they had no cloak for their sin." So must it be said to many amongst us; "that having been exalted to heaven" in their privileges, they have reason to expect that they shall, with Capernaum, "be cast the deeper into hell" for their abuse of them. It is a small matter that their sins have not been such as to expose them to shame and reproach among men: their neglect of Christ, their want of love to his name, and zeal in his service, must be reckoned for at the last day, when he will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." O painful retrospect! O afflictive prospect! Brethren, take a review of your past lives; and seek "the things belonging to your peace, before they be for ever hid from your eyes."]

What then remains to be done by these distinct, but perishing, classes? To both the one and the other we would say, Consider,

II. The sinner's alternative—

There

There is but one alternative for any child of man: we must either attend to the voice of instruction given us in the Gospel, or we must carry with us unchanging and unavailing remorse into the eternal world.

Are we willing to spend eternity in self-condemning reflections?

[They must follow us, if we die in our sins. God himself will remind us of the benefits which here we neglected to improve: "Son, remember, that thou in thy life-time hadst such and such advantages." What anguish of mind will be occasioned by such thoughts as these: "I once had the same offers of salvation, as they had who are now before the throne of God: I enjoyed the same heavenly instruction as they; but I despised it, and would not hear the voice of the charmer, how wisely soever he endeavoured to charm me!" This will be the ground of our heavier "condemnation, that light came into the world, but that we loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds were evil:" and our reflections upon this will be "a never-dying worm," gnawing our conscience to all eternity. Whether our sins were more or less flagrant, this will be the source of our greatest torment, that we despised the instructions given us in the Gospel, and trampled under foot that very Son of God who came into the world to seek and save us.]

If we would not spend an eternity in these bitter reflections, we must now attend to the things which are revealed to us in the Gospel—

[If our teachers speak out of their own minds, we may refuse to hearken to them: but, if they speak to us the very word of God, then it is at our peril to turn a deaf ear to their instructions. The word of God is sufficient to "make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ." It bids us flee to Christ, as to a strong hold, where we shall be safe from the assaults of sin and Satan. It assures us, that "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" that "his blood will cleanse us from all sin;" that "his grace is sufficient for us;" and that "he will cast out none who come unto him." Follow these directions, and you are safe: give yourselves up to him; live altogether by faith upon him; improve for his glory the grace which you receive out of his fulness; and you have nothing to fear. Instead of remorse and sorrow, you shall be filled with peace and joy. In the midst of life it shall be a matter of "rejoicing to you, that you have the testimony of a good conscience;" in a dying hour you shall look back with comfort in the thought of having "fought a good

a good fight, and finished your course, and kept the faith;" and to all eternity shall you glory in the mercies and privileges which you here enjoyed[b].

Here then is your alternative: Despise this instruction, and you shall perish: Obey it, and you shall live for ever.]

ADVICE—

1. Endeavour to view every thing in the light of eternity—

[If you think of time only, the value of present enjoyments will be unduly magnified: but think of eternity, and nothing will be deemed important but the salvation of the soul———]

2. Endeavour so to spend each day, as you will wish you had spent it, when you shall be standing at the judgment-seat of Christ—

[We know what the wishes are of men who are condemned to death for their violations of the law: and we may be sure that such will be our wishes when we are summoned to meet our Judge: 'O that I had lived a very different life!' ———Now then cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart, and devote yourselves to him without reserve. So shall you behold his face in peace, and be partakers of his glory for evermore.]

[b] Rev. i. 5.

CCCCXLVI.

THE CAPTIVATING POWER OF SIN.

PROV. v. 22.—*His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.*

THE force of habit is well known: it operates as a second nature; so constant is it in its exercise, and so imperious in its demands. There is this difference however in habits of piety, and habits of sin; that the one are easily lost; but the other are with great difficulty overcome. Nor is this difficult to be accounted for; seeing that the one is against the course of nature, and the other conformable to all its propensities: the motion of the one is a continual ascent; the other is downward on a declivity. But it is not *merely* as a natural consequence that sin, when indulged,

indulged, has so great a power: there is an additional influence given to it by God himself, as a judicial act, and as a just punishment for indulging it: so that in a judicial, no less than in a natural sense, our text is true: "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself: and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins."

Let us consider,

I. The declaration itself—

In a two-fold view it may be noticed;

1. As a judgment inflicted—

[It is inflicted on the whole human race. There is not a sinner in the universe who cannot from his own experience attest the truth of it. Every sin has a power to enslave the mind, and to lead captive him who has indulged it. But we will instance this in some particulars.

The man addicted to drinking previous to the formation of his habit, had perhaps no particular love to strong drink, or desire after it: but he has been drawn into company, he has there acquired a taste for conviviality, and at last, by repeated excesses, he has contracted such a thirst for intoxicating liquors, that he cannot deny himself the use of them, or use them in moderation. He can see his character sinking in the estimation of all the sober part of the community, his health impaired, his fortune injured, his family suffering, and his eternal interests sacrificed; and yet he cannot cast off the habit which he has contracted: his soul is bound with it as with a cord, and he cannot burst his bonds.

In a similar plight is he who has given himself up to the gratification of his lusts and passions. They, at least as far as the mind is concerned, are increased by indulgence, so that every object calls forth desire, and "the eyes of the libertine are full of adultery, and cannot cease from sin[a]." His very soul, as it were, is sensualized, and, whether sleeping or waking, his imagination roves after the gratification of his lawless appetites.

Nor must I omit to mention the gamester, in whom the text is most awfully verified. Nothing can induce him to abandon his ruinous pursuits. Domestic ties, of wife and children, have no influence at all. The ruin of himself and family are all suspended on a card or die. Not even the experience of ruin will reclaim him. *Let his losses* be repaired again and again, and again and again will he return to the fascinating object, like the moth, and hover round it, till he is consumed.

I have

[a] 2 Pet. ii. 14.

I have mentioned these instances, as being more obvious and acknowledged: but the declaration is equally verified in the gay, the worldly, the profane; yea, and in the superstitious and self-righteous also. They all "feed on ashes; and a deceived heart hath turned them aside, so that *they cannot deliver their souls*, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand[b]?"]

2. As a warning given—

[In this view more especially the declaration in our text is introduced, to guard young men against the temptations to which they are exposed[c]. And a most awful warning it is: it shews us how earnestly we should guard against our besetting sins. Every man has some "sin which more easily besets him[d]," and by which he is more in danger of being enslaved. Now every man should find out what this peculiar temptation is; and should watch and pray against it; lest, by yielding to it, he provoke "God to give him over to a reprobate mind[e]," and to say, "He is joined to idols; let him alone[f]." We should labour to say with David, "I have kept myself from my iniquity[g];" and, with Job, "Thou knowest I am not wicked," not deliberately and habitually wicked[h]. We should dread lest that be inflicted on us which is spoken in the text; a judgment far heavier than any other that can be inflicted on us even by God himself, as *long* as we continue in this present life; because it is a certain prelude to everlasting misery, and the means of augmenting it every day and hour: for, if we are delivered over to our own lusts, we do nothing but "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath," and accumulate mountains of guilt to sink us deeper and deeper into everlasting perdition[i]. Our employment will be like that of those mentioned by the prophet Isaiah, who "draw out iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as a cart-rope[k]:" for, as a rope is spun out continually to an indefinite length by the constant addition of fresh materials, so will our sin be drawn out to an endless extent, till death shall cut it short, and the deserved punishment be awarded to it.]

It would be improper to pass over such a declaration as this without drawing your attention to,

II. The reflections which it naturally suggests—

1. How thankful should we be for the Gospel of Christ!

[Heathens are in the bondage above described, and have no conception of any way of deliverance from it. But in the Gospel a Saviour is proclaimed; who came on purpose to "preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison

[b] Isai. xliv. 20. [c] See ver. 20. [d] Heb. xii. 1.
[e] Rom. i. 28. [f] Hos. iv. 17. [g] Ps. xviii. 23.
[h] Job x. 7. [i] Rom. ii. 5. [k] Isai. v. 18.

prison to them that are bound[l]." His power no lusts can withstand. As he delivered Peter from prison, causing his chains to fall off, and the prison doors to open of their own accord, so can he liberate the slaves of sin and Satan from their bondage, and bring them forth into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Diseases, devils, elements, all obeyed his voice in the days of his flesh: and at his word the most deep-rooted lusts shall be plucked up, and the most inveterate habits changed. The day of Pentecost sufficiently attests the truth of this assertion. The hands of the men who had crucified him were yet reeking with his blood, yet in an instant were their hearts renewed, and they became altogether new creatures, "the wolf being as harmless as the sheep, and the lion as gentle as the lamb[m]."

However inveterate then your habits may have been, despair not: but look to "that Mighty One on whom your help is laid," and who is able to save "to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."]

2. How watchful should we be against the first incursions of sin!

[As we know not "how great a matter a little fire will kindle," so we know not what evils one sin may introduce. Every habit originated in one sin. Judas little thought in what his first act of dishonesty would issue: and millions, who are now gone beyond the hope of redemption, once thought as little to what a state they should be ultimately brought, as we now do. Say not, This angry temper is a light evil: It is murder in the seed and embryo; and may terminate in the very act of murder much sooner than you imagine. Say not, This impure thought or look is venial: it is constructive adultery; in which, ere you are aware of it, it may issue. The same I would say of envy, hatred, malice, covetousness, ambition, and the whole catalogue of spiritual lusts: the admission of them into the heart is as a leak in a ship, which will sink it ultimately, if it be not stopped in time. A mariner will not neglect that leak, though it be but small; because he knows the consequences: he knows that if it be neglected, his efforts to preserve the ship will ere long be vain and ineffectual. It is not possible to look around us without seeing, in numberless instances, what dominion the evil tempers of men have gained, and what misery they diffuse throughout their respective families and spheres. Had they been checked in their commencement, how much sin and misery would have been prevented! If then we would not forge chains for our own souls, let us guard against the first risings of sin: for, whatever we may think, "we shall reap according to what we sow: "he that soweth

[l] Luke iv. 18. [m] Isai. xi. 6.

soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting[n]."]

3. How constant should we be in waiting upon the Lord Jesus Christ, both in his public ordinances, and in secret prayer!

[None but Christ can afford us any effectual help: for "without him we can do nothing[o]." To him we must carry our every trial, and every temptation: and we must plead with him for help, as the Apostle did, till he answer us, and say, "My grace is sufficient for thee[p]." Let us never forget that it is in vain to resist sin in our own strength. None but God himself can subdue it in us. "Our sufficiency even to think a good thought must be of him[q]." If he help us, it is well: "We can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us[r]." But, if we address ourselves to the purifying of our hearts in our own strength, we shall fail, as the Apostles did, when in self-confidence they attempted to cast out a devil, which "could only be ejected through the influence of prayer and fasting[s]." Let us look simply to Christ to purge us both from the guilt and power of our sins; and then we shall find, that "according to our faith it shall be done unto us[t]."]

[n] Gal. vi. 7, 8. [o] John xv. 5. [p] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [q] 2 Cor. v. 5.
[r] Phil. iv. 13. [s] Matt. xvii. 21. [t] Matt. ix. 29.

CCCCXLVII.

THE SLUGGARD REPROVED.

Prov. vi. 6—10. *Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of thine arms to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.*

FORESIGHT in relation to temporal concerns, though not universally practised, is universally approved; and it is a ground of thankfulness that those classes of society who have hitherto scarcely known how to secure any little sums which they might save, have now, by the establishment of *Provident Banks*, encouragement to provide for themselves against the day of adversity[a]. Happy would it be if a similar zeal

[a] Preached the week before the establishment of a *Provident Bank* at Cambridge

zeal were now exerted in relation to the concerns of eternity. But here, alas! there is still a sad indifference amongst us. The wants which we are sure to feel in the eternal world are not anticipated; nor is the importance of providing for them generally felt. In relation to these things, all around us are cast, as it were, into a deep sleep, from which they need to be roused by the most solemn warnings. This address therefore of Solomon to the sluggards of his day may well serve us as a foundation for a similar remonstrance with those who are yet sleeping in security and sin.

Addressing ourselves to persons of this description, we will speak,

I. In a way of humiliating reproof—

Justly does Solomon observe, that "a sluggard is wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason[b]." The more careless men are about their souls, the more confident they are of their future safety. But, how confident soever they may be, they may go and learn wisdom of the meanest insect.

There is scarcely any thing in the whole creation from which we may not derive the most valuable instruction. The ox and the ass, the crane and the swallow, are brought forward by God himself to teach and reprove us[c]: and here we are referred for instruction to the ant. She collects in summer the food that is necessary for her subsistence in the winter. She does it with incredible labour, dragging to her cell grains of corn, that one would scarcely conceive she should be able to move. And this she does "without any guide" to direct her, or "overseer" to watch her, "or ruler" to call her to account. And, that her labour may not ultimately prove vain, she bites off, we are told, the ends of every grain, to prevent it from vegetating in the ground.

Go now to the ant, thou sluggard, and consider her ways: consider,

1. Her wise foresight—

[Has

[b] Prov. xxvi. 16. [c] Isai. i. 3. Jer. viii. 7.

[Has she a time approaching, against which it is needful for her to provide; and hast not thou? Is there not a time coming when thou must stand in the presence of thy God, and give an account of every thing that thou hast done in the body, whether it be good or evil? And hast thou not now to provide a righteousness wherein to appear before God, even the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, wherein alone thou canst ever stand in the presence of a holy God? Hast thou not a new nature also to obtain, in order to fit thee for the enjoyment of the heavenly world?——— And is not the present, the only time when this provision can be made? If thou neglect the present opportunities, wilt thou find them in the eternal world? Is there "any work or device to be executed in the grave, whither thou goest[d]?"——— If her work, which relates only to the short transient life of the body, is important, is not yours, which relates to the eternal interests of the soul, much more important——— Go then to the ant, and learn wisdom of her.]

2. Her voluntary labour—

[She has none to direct her: she is guided by instinct alone. But you have reason to guide you, and to assure you of the certainty and importance of those things which you have not yet seen with your eyes. You have God himself also inspecting every thing that you do, and pledged to call you into judgment for it, and to assign you your everlasting portion according to it. Should not you then exert yourselves with all diligence? Are you not convinced, that to prepare for eternity is "a reasonable service," yea, that it is, in fact, "the one thing needful?"——— Will you then grudge your labour? Will you not put forth willingly and habitually all the powers of your souls in this blessed work?———]

3. Her prudent care—

[Is *she* careful to prevent her labours from ever proving abortive; and should not *you* prosecute your work to a successful issue? Yet Solomon justly observes, that "the slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting[e];" yea, that "his very desire killeth him, because his hands refuse to labour[f]." Some kind of pains we all have taken in attending ordinances, and in complying with outward forms; but there we have rested, without any persevering efforts to render those means effectual for the salvation of our souls. We feel somewhat of a general desire after eternal happiness; and with that consciousness of desire we are satisfied, without pressing forward for the attainment of the things desired: and thus is fulfilled in us another declaration of Solomon, "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing[g]?" If good desires would suffice,

[d] Eccl. ix. 10. [e] Prov. xii. 27. [f] Prov. xxi. 25. [g] Prov. xiii. 4.

suffice, the sluggard would get to heaven as well as others: but if great and persevering exertions are necessary, he will rather forego the prize, than use the diligence necessary for the attainment of it. In a word, instead of "looking to himself that he lose not the things that he has wrought, but that he receive a full reward[h]," he suffers Satan to take out of his heart the seed that has been sown upon it, and to keep him, like the foolish virgins, from providing oil for himself, till it is too late. Say, thou sluggard, whether these things be not true of thee, and whether thou hast not need to go and learn wisdom of the diminutive and despised ant?]

We will yet further prosecute our address,

II. In a way of solemn warning—

As a man who has no provision independent of his labour, and no disposition to exert himself, must soon feel the pressure of poverty and want, so, sluggard, shalt thou feel these evils in relation to thy soul—

1. Reflect on the awfulness of thy state—

[The consequences of thy sloth are coming upon thee: they are coming *gradually* indeed, but *irresistibly*. "A traveller" comes not to his journey's end all at once, but *gradually*, and almost imperceptibly, by many successive steps. So neither wilt thou find the fatal consequence of thy sloth all at once; but every day and hour brings them nearer towards thee; and *that* too so clearly, that, if thou wouldst stop to examine, thou shouldst see evident symptoms of their approach. Who has not found, that the longer he lives in any sin, the more he becomes addicted to it, and enslaved by it? The truth is, that as a man by indulging sloth, whether of mind or body, becomes daily more unfitted for exertion, so the man who is remiss and negligent in his spiritual concerns becomes daily more alienated from God, and more averse to those efforts that are necessary for his salvation[hh]. The curse which is denounced against him seems so distant, that it will never come: but it is advancing as fast as the wings of time can carry it: as St. Peter says, "Their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not[i]." O sluggard! remember this: thou mayest "linger, like Lot in the plain;" but "thy judgment lingereth not; thou mayest slumber on yet a little while, but thy damnation slumbereth not:" the time is fast approaching when God will say to thee, as to him who hid his talent in a napkin, "Thou wicked and slothful servant!" and will give orders concerning thee, "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer

[h] 2 John 8. [hh] Prov. x. 4. & xx. 15. [i] 2 Pet. ii. 3.

outer darkness, where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth[k]."

These judgments too shall come upon thee *irresistibly*. You well know how entirely a man unarmed and sleeping is at the mercy of "an armed man" that seeks his life. And such will be your state, in the day that God shall deal with you, and visit you for your sins. You may call on the hills to fall upon you, and the rocks to cover you, from the wrath of your offended God; but they cannot perform for you this friendly office: no creature in the universe can help you: "though hand join in hand, you cannot pass unpunished." Reflect on this, thou sluggard! Now thou mayest "puff at God's judgments:" but ere long thou wilt bitterly regret that thou didst not improve the opportunities afforded thee to escape from them.]

2. Reflect also on the vanity of thine excuses—

[There are none so hardened as to avow a fixed determination never to seek after God: on the contrary, there is in almost all an indistinct purpose to turn unto the Lord at some more convenient season, which they hope is at no very great distance. Hence to those who would rouse them to exertion, they say, "A *little* more sleep, a *little* more slumber, a *little* more folding of the arms to sleep." They acknowledge in general terms the propriety, and even the necessity, of exertion; but they wish a little more time for indulgence to the flesh, before they set themselves in earnest to mortify and subdue it. But what has been the consequence of indulgence hitherto? Are you at all more disposed for exertion now, than you were when first you were bidden to arise? Is your ability for God's service at all increased by deferring your attempts to serve him? Have you not found, invariably, that procrastination has increased your difficulties, at the very time that it also enfeebled your powers? Say not then any longer, "There is a lion in the way," nor plead any longer for delay: but arise and call upon your God, if peradventure time may be yet afforded you to "work out your salvation," and to "flee from the wrath to come."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never yet been awakened—

[Have you no work to do? or it is a matter of small importance whether it be done or not? Is not the present life the only time for doing it? How long, then, wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" Knowest thou not, that if thou sleepest on till this short life be past, thou wilt assuredly awake in hell? What then shall I say to thee? Shall

[k] Matt. xxv. 26, 30.

Shall I say to thee, as Christ did to his sleepy Disciples, "Sleep on now, and take thy rest"? No: God forbid. Let me rather say, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light[l]." Verily, if thou wouldst now, even now, call upon his name, it should not be too late. Whatever thou wantest, it should be given thee: he would give thee the light of truth to shine into thy heart; the light of joy in his reconciled countenance; the light of holiness to attest thine acceptance with him; and the light of glory to perfect thy felicity. While ye have the light then, walk in the light, that ye may be the children of light.]

2. Those who, though in part awakened, are yet disposed to give way to slothful habits—

[This, alas! was the case both with the wise and foolish virgins; "they all slumbered and slept." But let me affectionately guard you against yielding to sloth. It is said, and the very best amongst us know the truth of it by bitter experience, that "the idle soul shall suffer hunger[m]." Who has not heard of the vineyard of the sluggard, where, through inattention, nothing was produced but nettles and thorns? To him is the same warning given as to the sluggard in the text[n]. Guard then against the excuses which ye are ready to make. See the excuses made by the Bride in the book of Canticles; how injurious to her welfare! how destructive of her peace[o]! "Watch ye then, and pray always." Had the Disciples watched, when they were directed to do it by their Lord, they would never have forsaken him as they did in the hour of his deepest trial. But, if you do not watch and be sober, depend upon it that Satan will prevail against you, and "sift you as wheat." "Be sober then, and vigilant." Give not way to drowsiness in your spiritual calling: but "give all diligence to make your calling sure." And, seeing that ye look for a period when God shall come to judge the world, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless. And "what I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch."]

[l] Eph. v. 14. [m] Prov. xix. 15. [n] Prov. xxiv. 30—34.
[o] Cant. v. 2—7.

CCCCXLVIII.

LOVE TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES INCULCATED.

Prov. vii. 1—4. *My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee: keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers; write them upon the table of thine heart. Say unto Wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call Understanding thy kinswoman.*

THROUGHOUT

THROUGHOUT the book of Proverbs we are strongly reminded of that expression of Paul to Philemon, "Though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee." There is an exquisite tenderness in the exhortations of Solomon, addressed as they are by a father to a son. Not that we are to suppose that they were intended only for Rehoboam: they were intended for the Church of God, in all ages: and to us, no less than to Rehoboam himself, is the affectionate language of our text addressed. But indeed a greater than Solomon is here. Condescending as the expressions are, they are addressed to us by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who is Wisdom itself incarnate[a]; and *his* are the counsels which we are so earnestly intreated to treasure up in our minds.

In discoursing on the words before us, we will shew,

I. The respect which we should pay to the counsels of Divine Wisdom—

By comparing our text with similar language in the New Testament, we see, that by the terms here used we have to understand, not the Decalogue only, but the whole revealed will of God. Now to whatever the counsels of the Deity relate,

1. They should be treasured up with diligence—

[Whatever is of more than ordinary value in our eyes, we lay it up with care in a place of safety; and the more of it we can amass, the richer we feel ourselves to be. Now there is nothing in the whole universe to be compared with the Scriptures of Truth, nothing that will so enrich the mind, nothing that will so benefit the soul. In the great mystery of Redemption "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The precepts too, and the promises, and the histories, and the examples, O who can estimate them as they deserve? ———To treasure these up in our minds should be our daily and most delightful employment. Not a day should pass without adding to this blessed store. We should always furnish ourselves with some fresh portion, on which to ruminate. Not that it is merely in the *mind* and *memory* that we are to store up this wealth, but, as Moses tells us, in our *heart* and in our

[a] See Prov. viii. 22—32.

our *soul*; "Ye shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul[b]:" this is the proper seat of Divine knowledge; and here should we endeavour to amass the only true wealth, "the unsearchable riches of Christ."]

2. They should be watched over with care—

[Nature has made peculiar provision for the eye, so that, by an involuntary and instantaneous motion of the eye-lid, it is preserved from innumerable injuries which it must otherwise sustain. Now with the same care that we guard "the apple of our eye," we should watch over and preserve the treasures of wisdom, which we have accumulated in our hearts. Satan is ever labouring to "take out of our hearts the word of life," as our Lord has told us in the parable of the Sower: and it requires the utmost vigilance on our part to defeat his efforts. Indeed the heart itself is but too prone to lose its riches through any apertures by which the world has entered; so that we need to "give the most earnest heed lest at any time we should let them slip[c]." Besides, if we be not constantly on our guard against "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches," and other foolish and hateful lusts, we shall find to our cost, that these "weeds and thorns will choke all the good seed that has been sown in our hearts, and will render it unfruitful." Our care and watchfulness therefore should be incessant, that nothing be permitted to rob us of our good principles, or to weaken their influence on our souls. If, as we are told, God "himself keeps his people as the apple of his eye[d]," surely we should exercise all possible vigilance to keep his counsels, and preserve inviolate his holy commandments.]

3. They should be kept ready for use—

[It is not sufficient that we have reduced the counsels of God, as it were, to certain heads, and made memorandums of them in our books, so as to be able to refer to them when occasion requires: we should have them "inscribed on the tablet of our hearts," so that they may be always at hand, ready to direct and regulate our ways. Conscience, by looking inward, should be able to see them in an instant, and to suggest the line of conduct conformable to them. Moreover, we should have them "bound also upon our fingers," so as both to be reminded of them at all times, and be ever ready to carry them into execution. To this effect Solomon explains his meaning: "Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee: for the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light: and reproofs of instruction are the way of life[e]."]

4. They

[b] Deut. xi. 18.
[c] Heb. ii. 1.
[d] Deut. xxxii. 10. and Zech. ii. 8.
[e] Prov. vi. 20—23.

4. They should be guarded with the tenderest affection—

[With persons standing in near and dear relation to us, we are accustomed to live in habits of intimacy, consulting them on any occasions of difficulty, paying considerable deference to their judgment, and easily influenced by their opinions. Now in this light we should view the counsels of our God: we should be familiar with them; we should consult them on all occasions, and yield them a willing ascendency over our hearts. Instead of standing aloof from them as strangers, we should claim, and glory in, our relation to them: we should "say unto Wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call Understanding our kinswoman." We should, by our conformity to the dictates of Wisdom, prove, and manifest, our relation to her; and constrain all who behold us to acknowledge, that God is our Father, and that Christ, "the Wonderful Counsellor," is our Friend.]

To encourage this acquaintance with the Divine counsels, we will proceed to state,

II. The benefits which we shall derive from a due attention to them—

In our text itself, the great benefit of complying with the exhortation is stated, in short but comprehensive terms; "Keep my commandments, and live." But in the verses following our text, a particular advantage is insisted on, namely, the being delivered from the snares and temptations to which we are exposed. That we may comprehend both, we would observe, that by our attention to the Divine counsels,

1. We shall be delivered from evil—

["From the way of the evil woman" is particularly noticed, both here and in the preceding chapter: and doubtless an attention to the counsels of Wisdom will eventually secure us against those temptations which lead captive so great a portion of mankind. But we need not confine our views to iniquities of one kind only: the advice here given is equally useful in preserving men from snares of every kind. From the inspired Volume we learn the folly and malignity of every sin. The temptations of the world, the lusts of the flesh, and the devices of Satan, are all there exposed; and armour is laid up for us, that we may successfully maintain the combat against them. Our blessed Lord himself, in whom was no sin, drew from this armoury the arrows and the shield with which he vanquished the tempter in the wilderness: and from the

the same source must we also be furnished. Thus David tells us: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? Even by taking heed thereto according to thy word:" and again, "Thy word have I hid within my heart, that I might not sin against thee." Would you then be kept from evil tempers, and evil passions, and evil habits of every kind? Study the Sacred Records: treasure up in your minds the terrors of God's wrath as there revealed, and the declarations of his mercy as there promulgated. There see the wonders of Redeeming Love unfolded to your view, and the blessedness of those who have been monuments of converting and saving Grace. Let every part of God's word have its proper bearing on your hearts and consciences, and it shall be effectual for your salvation. Whatever lusts you have hitherto indulged, you shall, through the influence of the word, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, be sanctified; as our Lord has said; "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth:" and again, "Now are ye clean through the word that has been spoken unto you."]

2. We shall be carried forward in safety to everlasting life—,

[So says our text; "Keep my commandments, and live." So also says our blessed Lord: "I know that thy commandment is life everlasting[f]." We must remember, that it is not of mere morality that we are now speaking, but an impartial attention to the whole revealed will of God. And where this is, God will surely pour out upon the soul his richest blessings. Hear what our blessed Lord says respecting this: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him:" yea, "We will come to him, and make our abode with him[g]." What unspeakable benefits are these! Favoured with such communications, what can we want?— — —But it is not in this world only that such persons are blessed: for to them are secured all the blessedness and glory of the world to come; according as it is written, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to eat of the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the city[h]." This right indeed is not founded on any merit of their own; but solely on the promises of God made to them in Christ Jesus. It is Christ who, by his obedience unto death, has purchased these blessings for us: but it is to his obedient servants only that these blessings shall ever be vouchsafed. They however shall inherit them; nor shall all the powers of darkness be able to rob them of their promised inheritance.

Only

[f] John xii. 49, 50. [g] John xiv. 21, 23. [h] Rev. xxii. 14.

Only "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom[i]," and you shall never be straitened[k], "nor ever fall; but have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[l]."

[i] Col. iii. 16. [k] Prov. iii. 21—23. & iv. 12. [l] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

CCCCXLIX.

ADDRESS PREPARATORY TO CONFIRMATION.

Prov. viii. 17. *I love them that love me: and those that seek me early, shall find me.*

THESE are the words of our blessed Lord[a], who, under the name of Wisdom, addresses himself to the children of men[b], and urges them to receive instruction from him[c]. But to *the young* they are more particularly directed: and it is for their encouragement more especially that I have selected them for our consideration at this time.

Two things they declare to us most explicitly;

I. Who they are that already enjoy God's favour—

God in some respects may be said to love the whole world, even in their present degenerate state: for "he so loved them, that he gave his only-begotten Son for them." But there are some who are more particularly the objects of his favour. Mark,

1. The description given of them—

["They love the Lord Jesus Christ." They know his character, as set forth in the Holy Scriptures; they know him to be the only, and all-sufficient Saviour of fallen man ———They have seen and felt their obligations to him, and have sought for redemption altogether through the blood of his cross———They live in daily habits of communion with him———They have a good hope of acceptance with God through him———and his very name "is precious to their souls"———]

2. The love he bears towards them—

["He loves them," and looks with peculiar complacency upon them, "rejoicing over them with joy, and resting in his love, and

[a] ver. 22—31. [b] ver. 4, 5. [c] ver. 32, 33.

and joying over them with singing[d]." To them he delights to "manifest himself, as he does not unto the world[e]," even to "come and sup with them[f]," and "make his abode with them" ——— "He rejoices over them to do them good[g]," imparting all needful supplies of grace and strength to their souls[h], and ordering all things both in heaven and earth for the promotion of their welfare[i] ——— He accounts them "his jewels[k]" and "his peculiar treasure[l];" and esteems the salvation of their souls a rich recompence for all the sufferings he ever endured[m] ——— For them does he interest himself day and night in heaven; ever "making intercession for them" with his Father, and preparing kingdoms for them, which they in due season shall inherit, in glory and felicity similar to his own[n] ———

O! who amongst you does not desire to partake of this blessedness? ———]

But as amongst you there must be many who are not yet in this blessed state, and who yet desire to participate this happy lot, we proceed to shew,

II. Who they are that shall certainly obtain it—

In some respects it may be said, that "He is found of them that sought him not, and made known to them that inquired not after him." But no person is authorized to hope for an interest in his favour, unless he seek after it. The promise is, "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find." But

The persons to whom the promise is more especially made, are "those who seek him early."

[Those who seek the Lord even "at the eleventh hour" shall not be cast out[o]; but those who in the early dawn of their day are found desirous of entering into the service of their Lord, shall surely be employed by him. The very circumstance of their seeking the Lord while yet they are free from the cares of this life, and before their souls are vitiated with its sinful pleasures, whilst their consciences are yet tender, and their hearts open to every good impression, is a strong *presumption* in their favour: we should be ready, without any express promise from God, to say, that such persons "shall never seek his face in vain." But we have an absolute *promise* in their favour: we can assure them from God himself, that they shall never fail."]

"They,"

[d] Zeph. iii. 17. [e] John xiv. 21—23. [f] Rev iii. 20.
[g] Jer. xxxii. 40, 41. [h] John xv. 5, 7, 16. [i] Rom. viii. 28.
[k] Mal. iii. 17. [l] Exod. xix. 5. [m] Heb. xii. 2. Isai. liii. 11.
[n] John xiv. 2. Rev. iii. 21. [o] Matt. xx. 6, 7.

"They," says our Lord, "shall find me"—

[Yes, he will delight to visit them: they are "the lambs which he will carry in his bosom[p];" "the little ones, whom he will never suffer to perish[q]." Though they be weak both in knowledge and in grace, "he will not despise the day of small things[r]." He says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And when he sees them flocking around him, he will "take them up in his arms, and put his hands upon them, and bless them[s]"——— When he saw only "*some* good thing towards the Lord God of Israel" in the heart of young Abijah, he noticed it with a distinguishing mark of his favour[t]: and how much more will he, when he sees "the babes desiring the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby," and actually grow in stature up to young men and fathers!——— Verily their hosannahs, however despised by men, shall enter into his ears with acceptance, and their prayers shall return in "showers of blessings" upon their souls[u]——— They shall "find him" *here* an ever-present help, and *hereafter* their inestimable and everlasting portion———]

ADDRESS,

1. To the Young People here assembled—

[You are about to be confirmed. But do you know what confirmation is? You were consecrated to the Lord in your baptism; and a solemn engagement was then entered into in your behalf, that you should love him, and surrender up yourselves entirely to his service. This vow you are now going to take upon yourselves. And tell me, Whether in my text you have not all the encouragement that your souls can desire? Give yourselves to the world, and you will inherit only vanity: but "seek to love the Lord, and you shall inherit substance[x]." Think how happy you will be through life, when you are the objects of the Saviour's care and love——— and think how happy you will be in death——— O let me not plead with you in vain! but "remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, in which you shall say, you have no pleasure in them[y]"——— "Seek ye the Lord whilst he may be found; call ye upon him whilst he is near[z]"———]

2. To Parents, and those who have an opportunity of influencing the minds of young people—

[This is a favourable opportunity for you to exert yourselves, and to concur with your Minister in his labours of love. Be

[p] Isai. xl. 11. [q] Matt. xviii. 14. Luke xii. 32.
[r] Zech. iv. 10. [s] Mark x. 14—16. [t] 1 Kin. xiv. 13.
[u] Luke xix. 40. [x] ver. 21. [y] Eccl. xii. 1. [z] Isai. lv. 6.

Be labourers together with him, with all your might — — — But do not forget that the glorious truths in our text are to be experienced by you also — — — And, if much of your day is already past, be the more earnest now in "redeeming the time" that yet remains to you — — —]

CCCCL.

WISDOM'S ADDRESS TO MEN.

Prov. viii. 29—32. *When he appointed the foundations of the earth, then I was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children! for blessed are they that keep my ways.*

THE Proverbs of Solomon are a rich compendium of moral precepts, suited to men in all the various situations of civil, social, and domestic life. Some intimations indeed there are of Evangelical doctrines; but they are neither numerous, nor distinct; the scope and intent of the author having been, not so much to enlighten the minds of men with respect to principles of religion, as to supply them with a code of sacred ethics, for the regulation of their conduct. Yet, in the chapter before us, the language is so peculiar, as to have induced the most able commentators to think, that there was in the author's mind an intentional departure from his accustomed plan, and a designed reference to Christ, the Saviour of the World. It is not our object to decide this point, but, rather, to exhibit the passage in such a view, as may render it most conducive to our spiritual improvement.

Let us consider then,

I. What is that Wisdom which here addresses us—

The two leading views of it will come under our consideration, if we interpret it as importing,

1. Wisdom personified—

[It is evident that, throughout the whole chapter, Wisdom is represented as *a person*; and it must be spoken of *as a person*,

person, in order to give scope for such a representation of it as is contained in our text[a].

Wisdom then was ever "with God, as one brought up with him." It is an essential perfection of his nature, attendant on him on all occasions as a Counsellor, without whose advice not any thing was ever transacted from all eternity. God has never done any thing from the mere impulse of his own sovereign will and pleasure: whatever he has predestinated, has nevertheless been "wrought according to the counsel of his own will[b]." Wisdom has presided in all his councils; nor has any thing ever been carried into effect without having previously received her sanction.

Her deliberations have been very mainly conversant about the affairs of men. God foresaw that man would fall, and, if left to himself, would perish, like the fallen angels. But he greatly desired to save man, if peradventure it might be accomplished consistently with his own perfections. Every one of his Attributes concurred in the wish; but with some of them there seemed to be claims, which interfered with that object, and which could not by any means be set aside. *Holiness* required, that its hatred of sin should be fully known. *Justice* required satisfaction for the violations of God's law, and could in no wise be induced to relax its demands. *Truth* also desired, that its honour should not be compromised. It had no objection to the exercise of mercy, if only the sacred word of God might be kept inviolate: but it could never consent, whatever object were to be attained thereby, that the immutable God should be "made a liar[c]." In this difficulty, all looked to Wisdom, to know, whether she could devise any way, whereby the exercise of mercy might consist with the rights of all the other attributes of the Deity. Wisdom intimated, that she had a plan to propose; a plan, whereby *Mercy* might have free scope for exercise, not only without invading or injuring the rights of any other attribute, but to the great advantage of them all, insomuch that all should be honoured to an infinitely greater extent, than it ever could have been, if their demands had been satisfied through the destruction of the whole human race. It proposed, that the Son of God himself should take upon him the sins of the whole world, and suffer, as man's substitute, all that Truth and Holiness had denounced against him, and all that the most rigorous justice could require. *Such* a sacrifice made to law and justice, to truth and holiness, would put on all of them an

[a] We beg this to be particularly noticed; because it is *the sole ground* of the following statement; which, if that circumstance were overlooked, might appear fanciful.

[b] Eph. i. 5, 10. [c] 1 John v. 10.

an honour, which they could never by any other means obtain — — —.

Her proposal, made with infinite delight to herself, was heard with infinite delight by Almighty God. Whilst she was thus, by anticipation, "rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth, and her delights were with the sons of men, she was daily God's delight, and rejoiced always before him." We may be assisted in our meditations on this subject, by considering a philosopher occupied with the deepest investigations, and crowned with unexpected success: what joyous exultation fills his breast! how is he ready to proclaim to all the world, "I have found it; I have found it!" Or perhaps we shall approximate nearer to the point, if we conceive of a physician, on whose skill the life of thousands is depending, discovering an antidote that will arrest the progress of the plague, and a remedy that will restore to health all those who are already infected with it: what pure and holy joy will animate his soul! But the Scripture itself furnishes us with various illustrations of this important idea: the woman finding the piece of money which she had lost, and the shepherd his sheep that had strayed from the fold, are each represented as calling for the sympathetic joys of their friends and neighbours: and, as these are intended to elucidate the joy which our Redeemer feels in the successful execution of his office, they may well serve to illustrate the ineffable delight which the proposals of Wisdom are represented as exciting in her own bosom, and in the bosom of the Deity.

But we have said that Wisdom may also be interpreted as signifying,]

2. Wisdom incarnate—

[Most Commentators think that the expressions in our text refer to Christ, who is called "the Wisdom of God[d];" and who, as the *Logos*, or *Word*, declares to men the hidden counsels of the Father.

Of him it is distinctly said, that *He "was with God*, and was God[e];" that "He made all things; and that without him nothing was made that was made." Here then we have the precise language of our text applied to the Son of God, who was from all eternity "in the bosom of the Father[f]," concurring with him in all that ever he planned or executed[g].

How *he was occupied in the concerns of men*, is familiar to all our minds. Truly "his delights were with the sons of men," whom he determined to rescue from perdition, and to "redeem unto God by his own blood." This was "the joy that was set before him, for which he engaged to endure the cross, and despised

[d] 1 Cor. i. 24. [e] John i. 1—3. with Heb. i. 10. [f] John i. 18.
[g] John v. 19. & x. 38.

despised all the shame that should ever be poured upon him[h]." No sacrifice was too great for him to make. Was it necessary that satisfaction should be made for all the breaches of God's law; and that the very nature that had sinned, should suffer? He willingly engaged to lay aside his own glory, and to assume our nature, in order that he might suffer, and, by suffering in our stead, "make reconciliation for our iniquities."

In undertaking this mysterious office, he was filled, as his Father also was, with ineffable delight. What joy the thought of ransoming our fallen race excited in his bosom, we are told by the Psalmist: for when it was declared by the Father, "with whom the council of peace was held[i]," that all creature-sacrifices would be insufficient for the occasion, he instantly replied, "Lo, I come; (I, thy co-equal, co-eternal Son, come:) I delight to do thy will, O my God! yea, thy law is within my heart[k]." A corresponding joy sprang up also in the Father's breast; as the prophet Isaiah tell us; for in the contemplation of the future accomplishment of this mystery, the Father, looking with infinite complacency on his Son who had undertaken the office, and on his people as accepted in and through him, he said, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth[kk]!" And, at the time when he bore an audible testimony to his Son from heaven, it was in these words, "This is that my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased[l]." Thus, in reference to this great event, it is said in our text, "I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him:" and in reference to the same we must understand that declaration of our Lord himself, "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world[m]."]

Thus, whether we understand the address as made to us by *Wisdom personified*, or *Wisdom incarnate*, we cannot but feel a deep interest in all that it has spoken to us, and set ourselves carefully to ascertain,

II. Our duty in reference to it—

Doubtless we should "hearken to its voice," and with child-like simplicity receive its loving instructions. We should,

1. Delight ourselves in the contemplation of wisdom—

[Wisdom generally, wisdom universally, should be the object of our continual pursuit: "through a desire of attaining it, we should separate ourselves, and seek, and intermeddle with

[h] Heb. xii. 2. [i] Zech. vi. 13. [k] Ps. xl. 6—8. with Heb. x. 5—9.
[kk] Isai. xlii. 1. [l] Matt. iii. 17. See the Greek. [m] John xvii. 24.

with all wisdom[n]." The works of creation should, as far as we have a capacity for such subjects, be investigated by us, in order to excite our admiration of that wisdom by which they were framed. The order and harmony of the heavenly bodies, the beauty and richness of this terraqueous globe, the exquisite workmanship of the human frame, together with the powers and faculties of our immortal souls, all open to us such inexhaustible stores of wisdom and knowledge, as, if duly explored, will strike with reverential awe the humble inquirer, and fill with devoutest gratitude the admiring soul. The works of Providence also, if once we are enabled to view them in their mutual relation and dependence, will transport the soul with wonder, and overwhelm it with the deepest sense of gratitude. No book in the universe, except the Bible, will convey half so much instruction to the mind, as may be gathered from a man's own experience of God's dealings with him, especially in the concurrence of his providence with the operations of his grace: and the man who has learned to read this book, and become conversant with its contents, has acquired "secrets of wisdom, which are double[o]," yea, which are tenfold greater than any which are known to the merely natural man. God has said, that "he has abounded towards his people in all wisdom and prudence[p]:" but "his secrets are with those alone who fear him[q]:" none others are at all able to appreciate his love: that "knowledge is plain only to him that understandeth[r]."

Our chief attention however must be directed to that adorable Saviour, who "spake as never man spake," and in whom his most inveterate enemies could not find a flaw[s]." In him we have such lessons of wisdom as the whole universe besides does not afford. In tracing all the circumstances of his life, we should do well at every step to inquire, What answer should *I* have given? what conduct should *I* have pursued? and, from such examinations frequently repeated, we shall learn at last, how far we are removed from true righteousness, and how much "folly is bound up in our hearts." In a word, we should sit at the feet of Jesus, as Mary did, drinking in, with insatiable avidity, the instructions of wisdom, and applying our hearts to them as the clay to the seal. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge[t]." In him is revealed to us "the mystery, that was hid from ages and generations," and "which the angels themselves desire to look into[u];" and the mystery, at the first intimation of which, long "before the worlds were made, the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God, the holy angels, shouted aloud for joy[x]."

No

[n] Prov. xviii. 1. [o] Job xi. 6. [p] Eph. i. 8.
[q] Ps. xxv. 14. Hos. xiv. 9 [r] ver. 9. [s] John viii. 46.
[t] Col. ii. 3. [u] 1 Pet. i. 12. [x] Job xxxviii. 6, 7.

No sooner was the commission given to make this known to men, than a host of the heavenly angels left their bright abodes, and came down to earth exulting, "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace; good will towards men[y]!"

These are contemplations worthy of our exalted powers, worthy of our high destinies: and to delight ourselves in them is the wisdom, and the happiness of man.]

2. Surrender up ourselves to its dictates—

[In every duty of life there is need of the suggestions of wisdom. Even good men often act a very foolish part, for want of a well-regulated mind. Many have no idea of that important truth, "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence[z]." To "walk in wisdom toward them that are without[a]," and to "give no offence either to the Jews, or to the Gentiles, or to the Church of God[b]," come not into the contemplation of many, any more than if no such things were required of us, and no such example had been ever set us. But our determination, through God's help, should be, under all circumstances, like that of David, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way[c]."

In fact, there is no true wisdom but that which is practical. The very end of knowledge is practice: and, however deep or exalted our speculations may be, "if we walk not circumspectly, we are fools[d]." But, in order to carry into effect the lessons of Wisdom, we must "watch daily at her gates, and wait at the posts of her doors[e]." We must bring our views, our desires, our motives, to the strictest scrutiny: we must apply to every thing "the line of judgment, and the plummet of righteousness:" and, above all, we must beg of God to give us "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and to make us quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord[f]." Without *this*, we shall continually err: without this, we shall inevitably fall.]

"Hear then the voice of Wisdom, *O ye children!*" Hear it,

1. Ye children in age—

[Ye can never begin too early to listen to the counsels of Wisdom. It is by them only that you can avoid the snares of a corrupt heart, and of a deceitful world——— Oh! think what dangers are before you: see "what multitudes are walking in the broad road that leadeth to destruction, and how few there are that walk in the narrow path that leadeth unto life!" and remember, that "you must reap according to what

[y] Luke ii. 13, 14.
[z] ver. 12.
[a] 1 Col. iv. 5.
[b] 1 Cor. x. 32.
[c] Ps. ci. 2.
[d] Eph. v. 15.
[e] ver. 34.
[f] Isai. xi. 2, 3.

what you sow: if you sow to the flesh, you must, of the flesh, reap corruption; but if you sow to the spirit, you shall, of the spirit, reap life everlasting[g]." Say not, that you are too young to receive her lessons: for she particularly encourages *you*, by expressing a more than ordinary solicitude for your welfare: "I love them that love me," says she; "and they that seek me early, shall find me[h]."]

2. Ye children in understanding—

[The poor, whose intellectual powers have never been expanded by the aid of education, are ready to imagine that it is in vain for them to explore the depths of heavenly wisdom. But be it known to all, that divine wisdom enters, not by the head, like earthly knowledge, but by the heart: be it known also, that it is not acquired by deep laborious research, as human sciences are, but by the teaching of the Holy Ghost; (for "the Lord *giveth* wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding[i]:") and so far are the poor from having any reason to despair of attaining it, that they are by far the most likely to obtain it, because they are more willing than others to be taught of God. Hence our Lord himself says, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight[k]." Pray then to God to "give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him[l]," and be assured "it shall be given you[m]," and you shall be made "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ."]

3. Ye children in grace—

[You have begun to know the value of wisdom: you have a little glimmering view of those great mysteries, of which we have been speaking. "The day-star has arisen in your hearts," and you have found "the ways of Wisdom to be ways of pleasantness and peace." But you must "go on unto the perfect day," even till Christ himself, "the Sun of Righteousness, arise upon you with healing in his wings." O seek to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!" Be constant in your attendance on the ordinances of God; search the Scriptures, and treasure them up in your hearts; and, above all, "be instant in prayer for fresh supplies of the Spirit of Christ: then shall you be guided into all truth; and "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days."]

[g] Gal. vi. 7, 8. [h] ver. 17. [i] Prov. ii. 6.
[k] Matt. xi. 25, 26. [l] Eph. i. 17, 18. [m] Jam. i. 5.

CCCCLI.

THE VALUE OF TRUE WISDOM.

Prov. viii. 35, 36. *Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul: all that hate me, love death.*

IT is common in the Prophetic Writings to find expressions which really relate to the Messiah, while they apparently speak only of some other person or thing; and while other expressions in the same passage have no proper reference to him at all. It is impossible not to notice this in the 22d and 69th Psalms, and in many other places which are quoted in the New Testament as referring to him. The same mode of speaking, we apprehend, may be observed in the chapter before us. In some parts of it, true religion seems to be characterized under the term "Wisdom;" but in others, Christ himself. From the 22d to the 31st verse, the language cannot well be interpreted as designating religion, nor even an attribute of the Deity: it can only be understood of God's eternal Son, who lay in the bosom of the Father, and before the foundation of the earth rejoiced in the prospect of becoming an inhabitant of this globe, for the salvation of sinful man. Yet, on the whole, we apprehend, that the exhortation to Wisdom at the beginning of the chapter speaks rather of piety as the proper object of our pursuit. We are sure that this is the general import of the term throughout the book of Proverbs; and that piety, as personified under this name, frequently addresses us. We rather lean therefore to the safe side in our interpretation of the text, than ground upon it any observations which may appear forced, or unwarranted by the text itself.

Two things then we shall be led to notice;

I. The benefit of seeking true wisdom—

Wisdom, whether relating to temporal or eternal things, is never found by chance: it must be sought by persevering inquiries, and be obtained as the fruit

fruit of diligent research. To those who do find it, it will be productive,

1. Of present happiness—

[By "life" we may understand *happiness;* and then the first clause of our text will exactly correspond with what is more diffusely stated in the third chapter[a]. Till we have attained true wisdom, we know not what real happiness means: "There is no peace, saith God, to the wicked." As for the mirth which the men of this world enjoy, it is only "like the crackling of thorns under a pot;" it blazes for a moment, and then goes out in spleen and melancholy. He who knows perfectly what is in man, says, "Even in mirth their heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness[b]." But when once they have just views of Christ, and are truly devoted to him, they are filled with "a peace that passeth all understanding," and, at times, with "joy unspeakable and glorified." Now they begin to know what life is: "they truly pass from death unto life." Their former was little better than a state of mere animal existence: but now they see the true end, and taste the true enjoyment, of life: they participate in a measure the blessedness of heaven itself. We appeal to those who have ever known what it is to "live by faith on the Son of God," and to feel the constraining influence of his love, whether one hour of "fellowship with the Father and the Son" does not outweigh whole years of fellowship with sin and sinners.]

2. Of future happiness—

["No favour can we find with God," till we are brought to the possession of true wisdom[c]. But, instantly on our embracing his dear Son as he is revealed in the Gospel, we are numbered amongst "his peculiar people," whom "he has set apart for himself," and esteems as "his jewels." *Then* there is no favour that he will not shew them: he will come down and "make his abode with them, and sup with them." He will "keep them with all the care and tenderness with which we keep the apple of our eye:" and he will administer to them, in every hour of trial, whatever shall be most suited to their necessities[d]. In the hour of death especially, "when they are going, as it were, through fire and water, he will be with them:" and, on the instant of their release from this mortal body, he will transport them on the wings of angels to his blest abode, there to behold and participate his glory to all eternity. But who can form any idea of the blessings he will *then* bestow. It is sufficient for us to know that his word is pledged,

[a] Prov. iii. 13—18. In this sense the term occurs elsewhere. See Prov. xxii. 4. 1 Thess. iii. 8.

[b] Prov. xiv. 33. [c] Isai. xxvii. 11. [d] Ps. v. 12.

pledged, and that what he hath promised, he is able also to perform.]

If such be the value of true wisdom, what must be,

II. The folly of neglecting it—

Sin of every kind is an act of hostility against sound wisdom: and, if the sin be wilful, it is an evidence that our hostility proceeds from a rooted hatred of vital godliness. There is the same mutual opposition, and irreconcileable enmity, between sin and holiness, as between darkness and light: they cannot consist together, nor can the love of both find room to dwell in one bosom. If then we allowedly neglect true wisdom,

1. We "wrong our own souls"—

[The soul has strong and just claims, which every sinner resists. As being of an higher nature, and endued with larger capacities, than the body, it claims that the body *should submit to its authority*. As being the only seat of intelligence, it claims that the body *follow its guidance*. As being immortal, and doomed to spend an eternity in inconceivable happiness or misery, it claims that the body *consult its interests*. But when the voice of wisdom is silenced, and sin is permitted to rule in our mortal body, then is the soul wronged in every respect; its authority is slighted; its counsel rejected; its interest sacrificed: it is even made the drudge and slave of the body, to execute its devices and to gratify its lusts. Who does not see, that if any man, for the gratification of avarice, should resist the natural claims of the body for food and raiment, he would be justly and universally condemned? And does *he* act less foolishly, who, in the manner before mentioned, wrongs his soul? Yea rather, is not his folly greater in proportion as his soul is of greater value? Truly this is a just picture of one who sins against true wisdom.]

2. We "love death"—

[Can any one, it may be asked, love death? We answer, No; *not for its own sake*; but, *as connected with sin*, he may. There is an inseparable connexion between life and holiness on the one hand, and sin and death on the other. Could sin and heaven be allied, and enjoyed together, doubtless every sinner would prefer it. But that is impossible. A specific and unalterable option is given us: and every man is perfectly free to choose the one and refuse the other, to adhere to the one and renounce the other. The sinner determines for himself; and

and by his determination declares his preference: he practically says, "If I cannot have the gratifications of sin without death, welcome death, welcome damnation; for sin I will have, whatever be the consequence[dd]." Now can one reflect a moment on such a choice as this, and not stand amazed at the folly that determines it? Will it bear an argument? Are not the excuses with which it is veiled, mere vain and empty delusions? And does not every one see the folly of them, the very moment he sets himself to serious consideration? Yet this is the conduct which men *call* wisdom; but which, if it obtained in relation to worldly affairs, they would call downright madness.].

"Suffer now, Brethren, a word of EXHORTATION," while I address myself,

1. To the despisers of true wisdom—

[Consider a little more attentively, what it is that you despise. The thing to which you are exhorted is, to seek acceptance with an offended God; to embrace the salvation which he offers us in the Son of his love; and to devote yourselves to him in a way of holy obedience———Is there any thing in this that merits hatred and contempt? any thing that should make a man choose damnation rather than submit to it? What if an ungodly world has agreed to call it folly; is it therefore folly? Has not God said, "The fear of the Lord, that is *wisdom*"? Is there a saint in heaven, or on earth, that does not account it wisdom? Yea, is there a soul even in hell itself that is not now of the same mind? We go further still, and ask, Whether they who most deride religion now, will not be convinced of its excellence the very moment that their soul is required of them? "How long then, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" "Turn you at my reproof," says God: "O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be of an understanding heart[e]"———Say not, "It is too soon for me to seek the Lord." It is never too soon to be wise: and they who seek the Lord in their youth, have peculiar encouragement from him to do so: "I love them that love me; and they that seek me early, *shall* find me[f]."]

2. To those who profess to have found it—

[Men will judge of religion, not by what the Bible says of it, but by what they see in those who profess it: and one instance of folly in the Lord's people will do more to prejudice them against religion, than a thousand good actions to recommend it. I would therefore strongly urge those who profess

[dd] Mark strongly here God's own appeal, "Why *will* ye die? Ezek. xxxiii. 11. compared with Acts xiii. 46. & Prov. xv. 32.

[e] Prov. i. 22, 23. & viii. 5. [f] ver. 17.

profess godliness, to bear in mind, how much the interests of religion depend on them. Real piety consists not in talkativeness or eccentricities of any kind, but in a devout regard to God's honour and authority, and a wise, prudent, circumspect deportment before men. It does not countenance us in an officious assumption of the duties of others, but in a punctual performance of those which belong to our own place and station: "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence[g]." The not attending to this declaration has caused much offence in the world: and it becomes us to be very careful of casting stumbling-blocks before men, or "causing the way of truth to be evil spoken of." Let us then "walk in wisdom towards them that are without;" "giving no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." And while we adopt the resolution of David, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way[h]," let us remember by whose strength alone we can effect this; and pray with him, "O give me understanding in the way of godliness!"]

[g] ver. 12. [h] Ps. ci. 2.

CCCCLII.

EFFECTS OF SLOTH AND DILIGENCE COMPARED.

Prov. x. 4. *He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.*

IT is certainly true, that men's circumstances in life depend on their own exertions, so far at least, as to justify the declaration in the text. Sometimes indeed God is pleased to raise men to opulence by labours not their own; and sometimes to withhold success from the industrious. But though this inequality is sometimes found in the dispensations of his Providence, we never see it in the dispensations of his grace. After the first communications of grace to the soul, men's progress or decay will always be proportioned to their own care and vigilance: the propositions in the text may be advanced without any exception;—

I. Remissness will impoverish the soul—

Many there are who "deal with a slack hand"—

[This may be said of men *when they improve not the means of spiritual advancement.* God has appointed reading[a], and

[a] Col. iii. 16.

and meditation[b], and prayer[c], and self-examination[d], as means of furthering the welfare of the soul———But, if we be remiss in these, we resemble a man who neglects to cultivate his fields: nor can it be expected that we should ever prosper in our spiritual concerns.

It may also be said of them *when they shun not the occasions of spiritual decay.* God has mercifully guarded us against the cares[e], the pleasures[f], the company of the world[i]; and against the indulgence of any secret sin[h]———And it is of the utmost importance that we attend to these salutary cautions. But if we are unmindful of them, we certainly shew a very culpable remissness, and give advantage to our enemies to prevail against us.]

Under such circumstances they will infallibly "become poor"—

[They will lose *their joy and confidence.* Persons living in habitual watchfulness are often full of the most lively joy[j], and can look up to God as their Father[k], to Christ as their Saviour[l], and to heaven as their home[m]. But these divine impressions are tender plants, which, if not duly watered, will soon wither and decay[n]———]

2. They will also lose *their health and strength*—

[There is a health of the soul, as well as of the body: and as the one cannot be maintained in strength but by proper food and exercise, so neither can the other. The graces of the soul, if not duly cultivated, will soon languish. The faith will become weak, the hope faint, the love cold———and whatever good "things remain in us, they will be ready to die." So poor will every one become, who dealeth with a slack hand.]

While the soul is exposed to such evils from remissness, we are assured, on the contrary, that—

II. Diligence will enrich it—

Christian diligence comprehends far more than a mere attention to outward forms, however regular—

[It imports *a seasonable attention to all duties.* There are some duties which, in comparison of others, are easy: but Christian diligence makes no distinction on this account: nor does

[b] Ps. i. 2. [c] 1 Thess. v. 17.
[d] Ps. iv. 4. & lxxvii. 6. & 2 Cor. xiii. 5. [e] Matt. xiii. 22. & vi. 21.
[f] 1 Tim. v. 6. & 2 Tim. iii. 4. [g] 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.
[h] Prov. iv. 23. Heb. iii. 12. See the examples of Job, Job xxxi. 1. David, Ps. cxli. 3. & cxxxix. 23, 24. [i] 1 Pet. i. 8.
[k] Rom. viii. 15. [l] Gal. ii. 20. [m] 2 Cor. v. 1.
[n] Gal. iv. 15.

does it make the observance of some an excuse for neglecting others; but endeavours to do every work, whether public or private, civil or religious, in its season [o].

It includes also *a conscientious improvement of all talents*. Various are the talents committed unto men. Time, money, influence, together with every mental endowment, are among those which a Christian will feel himself more especially bound to improve. He considers them as given to him for the purpose of honouring God with them, and of rendering them subservient to the good of men. He therefore will not wrap any one of them in a napkin, but will so trade with them as to deliver them up with interest whenever he may be called to give up his account [p].]

Such diligence will infallibly enrich the soul—

[The exertion of our powers does not command success; but God invariably puts honour upon it, and makes it both the occasion and the means of communicating his blessings. Our diligence in cultivating the land cannot insure the crop: yet it is by that, for the most part, that God replenishes our barns, and supplies our returning wants. Thus the diligent hand makes us rich in *grace*, in *peace*, in *holiness*, and in *glory*.

"To him that hath (that hath improved his talent) shall be given; and he shall have abundance." Every grace is improved by exercise [q]—from that improvement arises a "peace which passeth all understanding [r]"—the whole man is thus progressively renewed after the Divine image [s]—and an increased weight of glory is treasured up for the soul, when it shall receive its full reward [t]—]

INFER,

1. What a pitiable state are they in who never labour at all for the salvation of their souls!

[If remissness only will prove fatal, and that to persons who were once diligent, surely they must be poor indeed who have never entered on their work at all! Let the gay and thoughtless well consider this: for every man shall receive according to his own labour. Nor shall it be sufficient to say at the last day, "I did no harm:" the question will be, "What improvement didst thou make of thy talent?" And if we have buried it in the earth, we shall be condemned as wicked and slothful servants.]

2. What reason have all for humiliation and contrition!

[If we consider the greatness of our work, and how little any

[o] Ps. i. 3. [p] Matt. xxv. 15—18. [q] ib. ver. 29.
[r] Isai. xxxii. 17. [s] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [t] 2 Cor. iv. 17. 2 John 8.

any of us have done in it, we shall find reason to blush and be confounded before God. Yes; while the world condemn us as "righteous overmuch," we should be condemning, and even lothing ourselves for doing so little. What might we not have attained, if we had laboured from the beginning with the same anxiety and diligence as others manifest in their temporal concerns? How low are the attainments of the best of us, not only in comparison of what they might have been, but of what we once expected they would be! Let us then trace our poverty to its proper cause, our own remissness: and "whatever our hand findeth to do, let us henceforth do it with all our might."]

CCCCLIII.

PORTION OF THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS CONTRASTED.

Prov. xi. 18. *The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.*

TO a superficial observer the wicked appear to to have a far better portion than the righteous: for it is certain, that, in respect of earthly things, the wicked have the larger share; whilst the righteous, whether poor or not in this world's goods, are objects of general hatred and contempt. But, if we examine more attentively, we shall find that the advantage is decidedly and universally on the side of the righteous: for the wicked man, how prosperous soever he may be, worketh a deceitful work; but to the righteous, however depressed he may be for a season, shall be a sure reward.

Let us notice the contrast which is here formed between the righteous and the wicked;

I. In their characters—

Though "the wicked" are not distinguished in this place by any appropriate description, yet they are sufficiently marked by standing in contrast with the righteous, whose characters are accurately defined. The one "sow righteousness," which the other neglect to sow.

1. Let us consider this distinction—

[The

[The sowing of righteousness imports, that the person so engaged deliberately and with diligence endeavours to fulfil the will of God; and that he does so with a view to a future harvest. The great "commandment" under the Gospel being, "that we believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God[a]," he makes that his first concern. He comes to Christ daily as a self-ruined sinner, and looks to him as the appointed Saviour of the world. He seeks to be washed in his blood from all his sins, and to be renewed by his Spirit after the Divine image. In a word, his daily consolation is, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[b]." The aim of his soul is also to "walk in all things as Christ walked;" to cultivate altogether "the mind that was in him;" and so to approve himself to God in the whole of his conduct, that in the last day that testimony may be given him from the lips of his applauding Judge, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

The wicked, on the contrary, has no such thoughts, no such desires. An interest in the Saviour is not of any great importance in his eyes, because he feels no need of it, and concludes of course that he possesses all that is requisite for his acceptance with God. As for "mortifying his earthly members," and "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts," that is a work to which he is utterly averse. He rather studies to gratify himself, and to follow the bent of his own carnal inclinations. He may not indulge in gross sins: but he is altogether earthly; and, whatever he may have of religion, it is a mere form, that engages not his heart, nor is in any respect the delight of his soul.

In a word, the one looks forward to a future harvest, and sows with a view to that; the other looks no further than to this present world, and has all his desires bounded by the things of time and sense.]

2. Let us see how far this distinction is confirmed by the word of God—

[This is the very distinction which St. Paul himself makes between the carnal and the spiritual man; "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit[c]." The one "seeks his own things, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's[d]:" the other lives not unto himself, but unto Him who died for him and rose again[e]."

It is here particularly to be noticed, that the Scriptures do not make the distinction to consist in outward acts, but in the inward habit of the mind: the wicked is not necessarily distinguished

[a] 1 John iii. 23. [b] Isai. xlv. 24. [c] Rom. viii. 5.
[d] Phil. ii. 21. [e] Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

tinguished by open irregularities; but he makes *self* the end, and aim, and object of his life; whilst the righteous liveth altogether for, and to, his God."

A similar difference will be found between them,

II. In their end—

The wicked follows a mere shadow, which eludes his grasp—

[He seeks for happiness, and hopes to find it in the path which he has marked out for himself. But "he worketh a deceitful work," which invariably disappoints his hopes. Whatever be the gratification afforded him, it is transient, and brings no solid satisfaction with it. Whether his pursuit be more sensual, or more refined, it still leaves in the bosom an aching void, which the world can never fill. Solomon tried every thing that was within the reach of mortal man, intellectual as well as sensual; and, after a full experience of it all, declared it all to be "vanity and vexation of spirit." And, if there be a man in the universe who is able from experience to give any other testimony respecting it, we will be content that that man shall walk in his own ways, and not in the ways of God. But we have no fear that this concession will be productive of any evil; for there is not a man in the whole world that will presume to avail himself of it, since there is no man whose conscience does not tell him that the creature altogether is a broken cistern, and that no true happiness can be found, but in Christ the fountain of living waters.]

The righteous, on the contrary, have a sure reward—

[The seed he sows may lie a long time under the clods, and may seem as if it were buried for ever: but it shall spring up in due season, and bring with it a harvest of solid joy. The Scripture attests, that "the work of righteousness is peace[f]," and that "in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward[g]." And so it is invariably found. This "reward is *sure*" on two accounts: one is, that his success is independent of all casualties; and the other is, that it is secured to him by the promise of God himself. Happiness as arising from earthly things may be altogether destroyed by disease or accident, or pains either of body or mind: but spiritual happiness is independent of all these things, and often derives a zest from those very things which seem most calculated to subvert it.

If we look to a future state, where the wicked, notwithstanding all their neglect of heavenly things, hope to have a portion with

[f] Isai. xxxii. 17. [g] Ps. xix. 11.

with the righteous, we shall see the text fulfilled in all its extent. What surprise and anguish will seize hold upon the wicked the very instant he opens his eyes in the eternal world! Conceive of "the rich man" summoned from his carnal indulgences into the presence of his God: how little did he imagine but a few days before in what such a life would issue[h]! How deceitful had his work been, and how delusive all his hopes! But the righteous is sure to find his hopes realized, and his highest expectations infinitely exceeded; for God's express determination is, that "whatsoever any man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he who soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting[i]."]

SEE then,

1. The wisdom of true piety—

[Wisdom consists in pursuing the best ends by the fittest means. Now I would ask, What end is to be compared with eternal life? And by what other means can it be sought, than by those mentioned in the text? Let me then intreat you to "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time:" for now is the seed time; and you will to all eternity reap according to what you sow: "if you sow iniquity, you will reap vanity[k]:" "if you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind[l]:" but if you "plow up your fallow ground, and sow in righteousness, you shall reap in mercy," both in this world and the world to come[m]. Let me however add, that you must not be sparing of your seed: for, "if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly; but if you sow bountifully, you shall reap also bountifully[n]."

2. The folly of neglecting the immortal soul—

[Men will deride piety, because it is cultivated by few; and applaud worldliness, because its advocates are many. But the broad road is not at all the safer because it is trodden by so many, nor the narrow way the less safe because it is trodden by so few. Each path will have its proper termination, and issue in the state that God has assigned to it[o]. Can any thing then be conceived more foolish than to put our eternal happiness on such an issue, that it cannot possibly be attained but at the expense of God's veracity? Truly if such conduct were pursued in reference to this world, it would be accounted not only folly, but madness itself. It is represented by Solomon as a "laying in wait for our own blood, and lurking privily for our own lives[p]," yea, and as a "being in love with death itself[q]." Let me then urge all of you now to seek "the

[h] Luke xvi. 23. [i] Gal. vi. 7, 8. [k] Job iv. 8. Prov. xxii. 8.
[l] Hos. viii. 7. [m] Hos. x. 12. [n] 2 Cor. ix. 6.
[o] Matt. vii. 13, 14. [p] Prov. i. 18. [q] Prov. viii. 36.

"the one thing needful:" and let me encourage you to it by this consideration, that, "if you sow in tears, you shall reap in joy: and if you now go on your way weeping, bearing precious seed, you shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you[r]."]

[r] Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

CCCCLIV.

THE FOLLY OF MAKING A MOCK AT SIN.

Prov. xiv. 9. *Fools make a mock at sin.*

MAN in his first creation was formed after the Divine image; and there was not in his soul the least inclination to evil of any kind. But since his fall, he is become in love with sin: sin is the very element in which he lives: and so unconscious is he of its malignity, that he makes a mock at it. Doubtless all do not carry their impiety to the same extent. Some are openly profane, and given up to all manner of wickedness; not only not being ashamed of their ways, but actually "glorying in their shame."

We must not however restrict to persons of this description the declaration in our text. The evil that is there complained of is of far wider extent: it more or less attaches to every unconverted man. This will appear, whilst we open to you,

I. The conduct here reprobated—

Let us remember what sin is: "it is the transgression of the law[a]." Whichever table of the law be broken, or whatever command be violated, the violation of it is sin: and to make light of that transgression, whether it be more or less heinous in itself, is to make a mock at sin. Bearing this in mind, we say, that this evil is committed,

1. By those who live in sin themselves—

[Passing over the drunkard, who says to his companions, "We will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant[b];" and the robber, who invites his fellows, "Come, let us lay wait for blood, that we may fill our houses with spoil[c];" and the unhappy prostitute,

[a] 1 John iii. 4. [b] Isai. lvi. 12. [c] Prov. i. 11—13.

prostitute, who "impudently" assaults with importunity the unwary youth[d]; or a variety of other characters alike notorious and abandoned;—passing by these, I say, (whom to have named is quite sufficient,) let us look to the worldling, who, though walking in a more sober way, lives altogether for himself; or look to the self-righteous, who though admired and applauded as characters of superior excellence, have no true humiliation before God, no earnest desires after a Saviour, no real delight in holy exercises, no fixedness of mind to glorify their God. What shall I say of them all? Have they any just views of sin? Have they any suitable apprehensions of the state to which they have been brought by means of sin? Do not their whole spirit and temper shew, that they think light of it? and, if it were set before them in all its malignity and ill desert, would they not say, that the representation was exaggerated, and that the person who gave them the representation was deceived? They need not utter any words, to betray the thoughts of their hearts: these are sufficiently evident by the absence of all those feelings which a just estimate of sin would create: and, exactly as those who imagine that God will never punish sin, are said to "contemn God[e]," so may those, who think that sin will not involve us in misery, be justly said to contemn sin, and, in heart at least, if not in act, to "make a mock at it."]

2. By those who discountenance piety in others—

[Though a form of godliness will gain us applause, no man begins to experience the power of it without exposing himself to the censure of an ungodly world. Let a person be really broken-hearted and contrite, as every sinner ought to be; let him be seeking the Lord Jesus Christ with his whole heart; let him turn his back upon the vanities of the world, and separate himself from the society of those who would ensnare his soul; let him give himself to reading the holy Scriptures, to devout meditation, to fervent prayer, to a diligent use of all the appointed ordinances of religion; let him join himself to the Lord's people, and choose the excellent of the earth for his companions; let him, in a word, be in earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come, and in laying hold on eternal life; let him do this, and his nearest friends will instantly dissuade him from such a course: they will represent to him the inexpediency of such extravagant measures; they will complain of him as enthusiastic and righteous over-much. They will impute the change that has taken place in him to weakness, or vanity, or perhaps to hypocrisy and a desire of human estimation? Now then I ask, whence would such a disapprobation of his ways arise? Are they not such

[d] Prov. vii. 6—18. [e] Ps. x. 13.

such ways as are marked out by God? Are they not the very footsteps of the flock who have gone before him? Is not this course precisely such as common sense would dictate, and such as all mankind would approve, if the bodily life were in danger? Who would complain of earnestness in a shipwrecked mariner? Who would deride the cries and fears and efforts of a person endeavouring to escape from a house on fire? Yet in matters relating to the soul and to eternity, no sooner is the importance of salvation felt, and manifested, as it ought to be, than all who have any influence endeavour to quiet the fears, and to discourage the exertions, of the awakened soul. Could this be, if sin were viewed by them as God views it? No: the persons who thus discountenance fervent piety, declare, that they see no occasion for it; that we may very well be saved without it; and that sin has no such terrors, but that a moderate degree of attention will not suffice to escape from its threatened dangers. What is this, but to "make a mock at sin?"]

That such conduct may appear in its true light, I proceed to shew,

II. The folly of it—

However much we make a mock at sin,

1. We cannot alter the nature of it—

[Sin is "that abominable thing which God hates[f]:" he cannot look upon it, or on those who commit it, without the utmost abhorrence[g]. It is, whether we will believe it or not, "exceeding sinful[h]." Now we are told by the prophet, that many will "call evil good, and good evil; and will put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter[i]." But if the whole universe should do this, would they alter the essential qualities of these things? Would darkness cease to be darkness, and serve all the purposes of light? or would bitter change its properties to sweetness? So, whatever construction men may put upon sin, and however they may palliate its enormity, it will ever remain immutably the same; a defiling, debasing, damning evil; more to be dreaded than death itself. We may call it innocent; but it will "bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder[k]." We may roll it as a sweet morsel "under our tongue; but it will be the gall of asps within us[l]."]

2. We cannot avert its consequences—

[God has said, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God[m]." Now we may say to sinners,

[f] Jer. iv. 44. [g] Hab. i. 13. [h] Rom. vii. 13. [i] Isai. v. 20.
[k] Prov. xxiii. 32. [l] Job xx. 12—14. [m] Ps. ix. 17.

sinners, as the serpent did to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die[n]:" but we can never separate the penalty from the offence. We may represent the transgression, whatever it may be, as small; and may expatiate upon the goodness of God, and the impossibility of his visiting such an offence with such a tremendous punishment: but we shall not prevail on him to rescind his decree, or to reverse his sentence. He has said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die[o]:" and die it shall, even "the second death, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone:" nor if the whole universe should combine their efforts to avert the sentence, should they ever prevail in any single instance[p]. "The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men[q]:" and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one impenitent transgressor escape. How great then must be the folly of making a mock at sin! If we could prevail on God to accord with our views, and to concede that sin should pass unpunished, we might have some plea for our conduct: but if the effect of our representations be only to deceive our own souls, and to rivet the chains with which sin and Satan have already bound us, we must confess that Solomon's views of such conduct are just, and that they are "fools" who "make a mock at sin."]

To all of you then I would, in CONCLUSION, say,

1. Make not light of sin yourselves—

[Your souls, your immortal souls, are at stake. Were the consequences of your error only temporary, we might leave you to enjoy your own delusions: but they are eternal. There is no repentance in the grave. "As the tree falls, so it will lie." If you die under the guilt of sin, your doom is irreversible, your misery everlasting. How do millions that are now in the eternal world curse their folly for making light of sin, in direct opposition to all that God had spoken in his word respecting it! and in what accents would they speak, if they could now have access to you to warn you! I pray you then be wise in time; and seek without delay to obtain "the forgiveness of your sins through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus[r]"———]

2. Regard not the scoffs of those who do—

[Suppose it desirable to possess the good opinion of the world: yet surely to purchase it at the expense of your immortal soul is to pay too high a price for it: it is but for a moment at all events: and though it is valuable so far as it may give you an influence over them for their good, yet it cannot for one moment be put in competition with the testimony

[n] Gen. iii. 4. [o] Ezek. xviii. 20. [p] Prov. xi. 21.
[q] Rom. i. 18. [r] Col. i. 14.

mony of a good conscience, and the approbation of your God. Your are taught to expect, that if you will not countenance the world in their ways, they will do all they can to discountenance you in yours. You see that this has been the case from the beginning: from the time of Abel to this hour, "they who have been born after the flesh have persecuted those who are born of the Spirit[s]:" and not even the Lord Jesus Christ himself could escape their reproaches. "If then they called the Master of the house Beelzebub," wonder not if his servants also be designated by reproachful names[t]. If these things come upon you for righteousness' sake, receive them as a token for good[u], and bless God that you are "counted worthy to endure them[x]." God permits these things as trials of your faith and love; and if they at any time appear grievous to you, then think of the plaudit of your Judge, and how speedily the very people who now condemn you will themselves "awake to shame and everlasting contempt[y]," and will be among the foremost to proclaim your praise[z]. "Be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life."]

3. Endeavour so to walk, that those who mock at sin may have no occasion given them to mock at righteousness also—

[Whilst you in departing from evil "condemn the world[a]," you may be well assured that they will be glad enough to find occasion against you, and to condemn religion on your account. Endeavour then to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way[b]." Let the world "have no fault to find in you, except concerning the law of your God[c]." Let not your regard for the duties of the first table lead you to neglect those of the second; but be careful to fulfil the duty of your place and station towards man, as well as that which consists in the more immediate service of your God: and be careful to avoid all needless singularities, which in the sight of God make you neither better nor worse. As for preventing the world from taking offence, that is impossible. Darkness must of necessity "hate the light:" but take care that the light be that which proceeds from God, and not from any "sparks of your own kindling." "Walk in wisdom towards them that are without[d]:" "give them no occasion to speak reproachfully[e]:" but so cause "your light to shine before them, that they may be led to glorify your heavenly Father." Thus, though you should not "win them by your good conversation," you may at least hope "to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men[f];" and

[s] Gal. iv. 29. [t] Matt. x. 25.
[u] Luke xxi. 13. "*Unto* you: not *against* you."
[x] Acts v. 41. [y] Dan. xii. 2.
[z] Wisd. v. 1—6. [a] Heb. xi. 7. [b] Ps. ci. 2. [c] Dan. vi. 5.
[d] Col. iv. 5. [e] 1 Tim. v. 14. [f] 1 Pet. ii. 15.

and constrain them, in spite of all their mocking, to confess, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour[s]."

[s] Prov. xii. 26.

CCCCLV.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE WAY OF SALVATION.

Prov. xiv. 12.—*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.* *

ON no topic do men express a greater confidence than on the subject of religion; whilst that, of all subjects that can be offered to our consideration, requires most care in our inquiry, and most diffidence in our decision. All other subjects, as far as they can be determined at all, may be determined by reason; and in the investigation of them, reason is to a certain degree free, both in its deliberations and decisions. But spiritual things must be spiritually discerned: they are out of the reach of reason. Reason must judge whether the things which are presented to it are revealed: but, when that point is ascertained, they must be apprehended by faith alone. Reason can tell us nothing about the mystery of Redemption: it is faith alone that can apprehend that, or any of the other mysteries connected with it. Moreover, whilst reason can do so little in favour of religion, all the prejudices, and passions, and interests of mankind are acting in full force against it. Faith and sense are always at variance with each other, and always striving for the mastery; and unless faith be in lively exercise, sense is sure to triumph. Hence the Church of God is inundated with errors of various kinds: and hence we need to have frequently inculcated upon our minds the truth contained in our text, "There is a way which semeeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

In illustration of this truth, I will point out some of

* This was written a great many years after that on Prov. xvi. 25, without any consciousness that the subject had been treated by the author before: and, though it goes over some of the same ground, yet as it contains much new matter, he has here inserted it.

of those ways, which, though right in the estimation of those who walk in them, will assuredly terminate in death. No other issue will there be to the way,

I. Of sceptical indifference.

[There is a great degree of scepticism prevailing, in reference both to the divine authority of the holy Scriptures, and to all the principal doctrines contained in them: and men of considerable ability have laboured much to invalidate the former, and to explain away the latter. Hence many will say, 'How can I ascertain what is true, amidst such a conflict of opinions? or, How can I depend on any thing, of which so many great and learned men have doubted? Is it reasonable to suppose that God will call us to an account for not admitting what has been so often controverted, and, in the opinion of some, so successfully refuted? Let us rather hope that God, as a God of mercy, will accept us all, though we do not all walk in that precise way, which those who profess a greater reverence for the Scriptures conceive to be right.'

But these hopes will be found fallacious at the last: for there is far more criminality in unbelief, than men in general are aware of. It does not proceed from any want of evidence in the Scriptures, but from an evil bias in the heart of man. There is "an evil heart of unbelief," which causes us to depart from the living God. Men will not submit to God, but will exalt themselves against him; and think themselves justified in rejecting whatever they, with the short line of their reason, are unable to fathom. What would a philosopher think of a peasant who should argue thus in reference to sciences which he was unable to comprehend? and in what light must God view us, when we presume to sit in judgment thus on the plainest declarations of his word?

But supposing that there were not so much criminality in unbelief, should we be at all the more justified in neglecting our eternal interests? Does not reason itself teach us, that we are amenable to God for our conduct; and that, whether our views of Revelation be more or less clear, we should labour incessantly and with all our might to secure his favour? and should we not use all possible means, particularly such as he himself has prescribed, for the attaining of an insight into his revealed will?

However innocent we may imagine our scepticism to be, or however justifiable the indifference connected with it, this way will at last infallibly end in death. The Jews in the wilderness could not enter into the Promised Land because of their unbelief: and the same cause will operate also to the exclusion of our souls from heaven[a]. The people who denied the Messiah

[a] Heb. iii. 19. & iv. 1, 11.

Messiahship of Jesus doubtless thought that they were justified in so doing by a want of evidence: but our Lord said to them, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins[b]:" and in like manner he has commanded it to be proclaimed to every child of man, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned[c]."]

II. Of proud formality—

[Multitudes there are, who, like the Pharisees of old, are extremely attentive to the established forms of religion, and are observant of morality also, as far as it is approved by the world. In relation to these things they may be said to be blameless: and so good is the opinion which they entertain of their own state, that they would, without any fear of being confounded, ask, "What lack I yet?" In this state they are approved and admired of men; and therefore they conclude, that they are equally acceptable in the sight of God also. Persons of this description scarcely ever entertain a doubt, or a fear, but that all will issue well with them at the last. But they will find themselves awfully mistaken as soon as ever they go hence. They will then discover, that their obedience was infinitely more defective than ever they conceived it to be; and that, if it had been as blameless as they imagined, it would still have afforded them no ground of hope before God. Had such attainments as these sufficed, St. Paul needed never to have embraced the Gospel at all: or had they been capable of adding any thing to the righteousness of Christ, he never would have desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which was of the law? How erroneous a way to life this is, will be seen at once in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Few of the formalists of the present day can say so much in their own favour as he could: he could appeal to God, that he was not guilty of such sins as were common in the world, and that, on the contrary, he was observant of many religious duties, "fasting twice every week, and giving tithes of all that he possessed." Yet, because he viewed his state with self-confidence and self-complacency, he was dismissed without any blessing; whilst the self-abasing publican was pardoned and justified from all his sins[d]. But thus it ever will be: "God will fill the hungry with good things, but the rich he will send empty away[e]: "he will resist the proud, but give grace unto the humble[f]."]

III. Of intolerant bigotry—

[There are not wanting those who imagine that all religion

[b] John viii. 24. [c] Mark xvi. 16. [d] Luke xviii. 11—14.
[e] Luke i. 53. [f] 1 Pet. v. 5.

religion consists in zeal for their own particular sect or party in the Church. Amongst the Papists, this error prevails to an awful extent: and happy would it be if it were confined to them; but it is found in Protestants also, who are as bitter in proscribing each other, as the Papists are in anathematizing them. At what a fearful distance are Churchmen and Dissenters separated from each other, from the mere circumstance of their not adopting the same external form of Church government, even whilst they are perfectly agreed in sentiment as to all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity! From the spirit with which they view each other, one would be ready to think that Christ did indeed come to introduce division, not accidentally, but intentionally; not by a separation of his people from the world, but by an alienation of heart from each other. Who has not seen and mourned over the mutual accusations of the two parties, each rejoicing in any evil that can be found in the other, and each wishing the conversion, perhaps I should rather say, the extermination, of the other? And as men hate each other on account of outward forms, so no less are they embittered against each other by a difference in their internal principles; the Arminian hating Calvinists; and the Calvinist despising Arminians! Need I say how much some persons value themselves on the opposition they give to what they call enthusiasm, but what, in fact, is "true and undefiled religion?" Verily, in persecuting the truth, they think that they do God service: and well pleased they are to render to him a service so congenial with the malignity of their own hearts. St. Paul before his conversion was of this very spirit: and our Lord has told us, that in every age such would prove the persecutors and tormentors of his Church[g]. But whoever may be wrong, it is not possible for persons of this description to be right: the very spirit which they breathe shews "whose they are, and whom they serve," even him "who was a murderer from the beginning[h]," and who has been the great instigator of persecution from the time of Cain even to the present hour. Let such persons only see St. Paul's review of his own conduct in relation to this matter, and he cannot doubt one moment whither this path must lead[i]. Or if this convince him not, let him know, that if he possessed all the knowledge and faith and zeal of angels themselves, he would be only as "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal," because he is destitute of that prime grace which is essential to the very existence of true religion in the soul, the grace of love[k].]

IV. Of lukewarm attachment to the Gospel—

[Where the Gospel is preached with fidelity, it commends

[g] John xvi. 2. [h] John viii. 39—44. 1 John iii. 11, 12, 15.
[i] 1 Tim. i. 13. [k] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

mends itself to many as true, whilst they yet experience not its saving power on their souls. Yet the very circumstance of their discerning and approving of it is to them in the place of vital godliness, and an evidence that they are in the way to heaven. But religion is not a mere matter of opinion: it is a principle that pervades the soul, and operates upon all its faculties and powers. See how it wrought in the converts on the day of Pentecost; what new creatures they immediately became! And such will all become, as soon as ever they receive the grace of God in truth. The metaphors by which the Christian life is designated in the Scriptures, sufficiently shew how mistaken *they* are who rest in a mere approbation of the Gospel without feeling its constraining influence upon their souls: if the running of a race, or wrestling for the mastery, or fighting for one's life, have any just signification as applied to the Christian's state, it is impossible for those to be in the way of life who bear no resemblance whatever to persons so engaged: and the total want of anxiety and of exertion which they betray, proves, beyond all doubt, that they are not in the narrow way which leadeth unto life, but in the broad road that leadeth to destruction.]

V. Of unsanctified profession—

[Amongst the little company of the Apostles themselves, there was a Judas: and in all the Apostolic Churches also there were some who "professed that they knew God, but in works denied him." It must not be wondered at therefore if such exist in the Church at this present day. Indeed the parable of the Sower, and that also of the Tares, teaches us to expect, that Satan will sow tares amongst the wheat, and that it is not possible for man to separate them the one from the other. Unhappily, the persons themselves who are unsound at heart are not conscious of it. Satan so blinds their eyes, that they cannot distinguish between the unallowed infirmities of their nature, and the indulged corruptions of their hearts. Their evil tempers which are unsubdued, are regarded as light and venial frailties: their carefulness about the things of this world is softened down to necessary prudence: and the reigning impurity of their hearts is cloked under the veil of temptation. Whatever be their besetting sins, they find some excuse for them; and, because they have a zeal for the Gospel and make some sacrifices for it, they conclude that all is well with them. Having "a name to live," they have no conception that they can be really "dead." But such persons need to be reminded of what our blessed Lord has so plainly and forcibly declared, namely, that one single lust retained in the soul, though dear as a right eye or necessary as a right hand, will infallibly plunge the soul into that lake of fire that never

never shall be quenched[l]. Our blessed Lord has warned us, that the "saying, Lord, Lord," however confidently we may repeat it, will never avail us, whilst we do not the things which he says: and, that though we may have "cast out devils in his name," we shall find no acceptance with him in the day of judgment, if we have not really, and unreservedly, mortified the whole body of sin[m]. Let all professors of religion know assuredly, that "without holiness, real and universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord[n];" and that, whatever estimate they may form of their own state, "not he who commendeth himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth[o]."]

Seeing then that so many mistake the way to heaven, I will ADD a few words,

1. To guard you against all erroneous ways—

[There is one great evil which more or less pervades all descriptions of men, and that is, an undue confidence in their own opinions. If they "think a thing to be right," they conclude that it is right, and will take no pains to ascertain the truth or falsehood of their judgment. They think not of the deceitfulness of sin, or of the blindness of their own hearts, or of the subtlety of Satan; but go on confidently, as if they were in no danger of self-deceit. But why has God so often repeated that admonition, "Be not deceived," if we are not in danger of being carried away by our own delusions? We are told of many whom a deceived heart hath turned aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" And why should not this be our state, as well as the state of others? We actually *see* it in others: why then should we not *suspect* it in ourselves? It is certain that a man may "seem to be religious, and yet deceive his own soul, and have all his religion vain," because of some *one* sin that is unsubdued, and unperceived within him[p]? I can never therefore too earnestly impress upon your minds the necessity of diffidence in all that relates to your souls. There is but one standard of truth: and by that must every opinion be tried. If the way which you think right will stand the trial of God's word, it is well: but, if it accord not with that, it will prove delusive in the end, and issue in the everlasting destruction of your souls. Be it ever so specious, it cannot deceive God. To all then I would say, Act in reference to your souls as the mariner does in navigating a dangerous sea: he consults his chart and his compass continually; and, not contented with *thinking* himself right, he puts his thoughts to the test, and seeks for evidence that he is right. Then may you hope to

[l] Mark xi. 43—48. [m] Matt. vii. 21—23. Luke xiii. 26, 27.
[n] Heb. 12, 14. [o] 2 Cor. x. 18. [p] Jam. i. 26.

to avoid the rocks and quicksands on which so many thousands perish; and to reach in safety the haven you desire.]

2. To point out the only true way—

[There is a way, which seemeth indeed wrong to the greater part of mankind, which, however, is surely right, and the end thereof are the ways of life. This is the way of faith in Christ; as Christ himself has told us; "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me[q]." This indeed is not approved by the world at large: "to the Jews it is a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness[r]:" but it is "the good old way, wherein whosoever walks shall find rest unto his soul[s]." Let it not be any matter of astonishment that this way is not generally approved: for it is too humiliating for our proud hearts, and too self-denying for our low and groveling spirits. Men do not love to renounce all self-dependence, and to have all their wisdom, all their righteousness, and all their strength treasured up in another for their use, to be received daily out of his fulness in answer to urgent and believing prayer. Nor do they like to have that high standard of holiness, which he gives to his disciples as the rule of their life, and the test of their attainments. But, Beloved, this is the only true way to heaven: we must believe in Christ, and live altogether by faith in him, going forward in his strength, and "growing up into him in all things as our living head." Then, though regarded by men as self-deluding enthusiasts, we shall be approved of our God, and receive at last "the end of our faith, even the salvation of ou souls."]

[q] John xiv. 6. [r] 1 Cor. i. 23. [s] Jer. vi. 16. Matt. xi. 28, 29.

CCCCLVI.

THE VANITY OF CARNAL MIRTH.

Prov. xiv. 13. *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*

WE are apt to imagine, that whatever is sanctioned by the approbation and practice of the world at large, must be right: but we cannot have a more erroneous standard than popular opinion. This is sufficiently evident from the estimation in which mirth and laughter are generally held: they are supposed to constitute the chief happiness of man; whereas they are far from producing any solid happiness at all. To this mistake Solomon refers, in the

the words preceding the text; and in the text itself he confirms the truth of his own position.

We shall,

I. Demonstrate the vanity of carnal mirth—

We mean not to condemn all kinds and degrees of mirth: there certainly is a measure of it that is conducive to good, rather than to evil; "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance," and "doeth good like a medicine." But carnal mirth is distinct from cheerfulness of disposition; inasmuch as it argues a light frivolous state of mind, and indisposes us for serious and heavenly contemplations. Of *this* mirth we affirm, that it is,

1. Empty—

[Let us examine the mirth which we have at any time experienced; let us weigh it in a balance; let us compare it with that sobriety of mind which results from scenes of woe, and with that tenderness of spirit which is the offspring of sympathy and compassion; and we shall confess, with Solomon, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting[a]:" yea, the more we examine it, the more shall we be constrained, like him, to "say of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it[b]?" It may be justly called, "a filling of our belly with the east wind[c]."]

2. Fictitious—

[The gaiety which is exhibited in worldly company is often assumed, for the purpose of concealing the real feelings of the heart. They who appear so delighted to see each other, have frequently no mutual affection: even the nearest relatives, who seem to participate each other's joys, have so little real cordiality at home, that they can scarcely endure each other's conversation; and would be heartily glad, if the knot which binds them together could be dissolved. Truly "in their laughter their heart is sorrowful;" their pride, their envy, their jealousy, their private piques, their domestic troubles, or their worldly cares, make them inwardly sigh, so that they can with difficulty prevent the discovery of the imposture which they are practising. The very emptiness of their pleasure fills them often with disgust; and they are constrained to acknowledge, that "they are feeding on ashes, and that they have a lie in their right hand[d]."]

3. Transient—

[Suppose

[a] Eccl. vii. 1—3. [b] Eccl. ii. 1, 2. [c] Job xv. 2. [d] Isai. xliv. 20.

[Suppose it to have been far more substantial than it has, yet how speedily has it vanished away! What trace of it remains? It is like a dream when one awaketh: in our dream we thought of satisfaction; but when we awoke, we found ourselves as unsatisfied as ever[e]. If we thought by repeated participation to protract the pleasure, we weakened the zest with which we had partaken of it; and thus diminished, rather than increased, the sum of our enjoyment.]

4. Delusive—

[We hoped that the ultimate effect of all our mirth would be an easy comfortable frame: but has it always been so? Has not the very reverse been often experienced by us? Has not "the end of our mirth been heaviness?" An excessive elevation of spirit is naturally calculated to produce depression. Besides, we cannot always shake off reflection: and the thought of having so foolishly wasted our time, instead of improving it in preparation for eternity, will sometimes produce very uneasy sensations. Such warnings as Solomon[f], and our Lord[g], have given us, will frequently obtrude themselves upon us, and make us almost weary of life, while at the same time we are afraid of death: so justly is this mirth compared to "the crackling of thorns under a pot[h];" the one, after an unprofitable blaze, terminating in smoke and darkness; the other, after a senseless noise, expiring in spleen and melancholy. In fact, there are no people more subject to lowness of spirits, than they who spend their time in vanity and dissipation.

What will be "the end of their mirth" when they come into the eternal world, is inexpressibly awful to consider. Fearful indeed will be the contrast between the festivities of their present, and the wailings of their eternal state[i]! Would to God that man would learn this from a parable[k]! but, if they will not, they must realize it in their own experience.]

That we may not appear as if we would deprive you of all happines, we shall—

II. Shew how we may attain more solid mirth—

There is evidently a contrast intended in the text: for when it is said that "the end of *that* mirth is heaviness," it is implied, that there is another species of mirth that shall end in a very different manner.

The Gospel is a source of mirth to all who embrace it—

[The Gospel is called "glad tidings of great joy to all people."

[e] Isai. xxix. 8. [f] Eccl. xi. 9. [g] Luke vi. 25.
[h] Eccl. vii. 6. [i] Amos vi. 1—6, [k] Luke xvi. 19, 24, 25.

people." It proclaims Salvation to a ruined world; nor can it fail of creating the liveliest emotions of joy wherever it is received[l]———]

And the mirth resulting from it, is the very reverse of carnal mirth—

[It is *solid*.—Behold the change wrought in the first converts! see them turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God! see them enjoying peace with God and in their own consciences! see them filled with love to each other, and with admiring and adoring thoughts of their beloved Saviour! Can we wonder that they eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God? Yet precisely the same grounds of joy has every one that truly believes in Christ[m]. The prodigal *fancied* that he was in the road to joy, when he was wasting his substance in riotous living: but he never tasted real happiness, till he returned to his father's house: then "he *began* to eat, and drink, and be merry."

It is *permanent*—It will consist with trials and tribulations; yea, it will even arise out of them[n]: we may be "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing[n]." And, as it is not interrupted by the occurrences of life, so neither will it be terminated by death: it will then be augmented a thousand-fold; and continue without interruption to all eternity ———]

ADDRESS,

1. The young and gay—

[Follow your career of pleasure as long as you will, you will be constrained to say at last with Solomon, not only, that it was all "vanity," but also "vexation of spirit." Yet think not, that in dissuading you from these lying vanities, we should deprive you of all happiness: we wish only that you should exchange that which is empty and delusive, for that which will afford you present and eternal satisfaction[o]. Even your past experience may suffice to shew you, that "in the fulness of your sufficiency you have been in straits[p]:" try now what the service and enjoyment of God can do for you; and you shall find that Religion's "ways are indeed ways of pleasantness and peace."]

2. Those who profess godliness—

[In avoiding carnal mirth, you must be careful not to give occasion to the world to represent religion as sour and morose. There is a cheerfulness which recommends religion, and which it is both your duty and privilege to maintain. Yet, on the other hand, beware of levity. Live nigh to God, and you will easily

[l] Isai. li. 3, 11. & lxv. 18. & Jer. xxxi. 4. with Acts viii. 8, 39.
[m] Jer. xxxi. 11—14. [n] Rom. v. 3. Jam. i. 2. [n] 2 Cor. vi. 10.
[o] Isai. lv. 2. [p] Job xx. 22.

easily find the proper medium. "God has certainly given you all things richly to enjoy[q]:" yet it is in himself alone, and in the light of his countenance, that you must seek your happiness. *There* you are sure to find it[r]; and while you find it in him, you will shine as lights in a dark world, and recommend the Gospel to all around you.]

[q] 1 Tim. vi. 17. [r] Ps. iv. 6, 7.

CCCCLVII.

THE UPRIGHT ALONE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.

Prov. xv. 8. *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.*

THE language of Scripture is often extraordinarily emphatic. This not unfrequently arises from the strength of the metaphors that are used to express the mind of the writer: and frequently from the speaking of God in terms, which, in their strict sense, are applicable only to men. Of course, we are not to conceive of God as possessing either parts or passions; and when either the one or the other are ascribed to him, we must regard it only as a condescension to our weakness, which is incapable of comprehending any thing respecting God, except by a sort of comparison of him with man. Of all his natural perfections, such as immensity and eternity, we know nothing at all: that is to say, our knowledge is merely negative. And respecting his moral perfections, as justice, mercy, truth, we know as little, except as we transfer to him the notions which we have formed of such perfections as exist in the human mind. We associate very distinct ideas with those attributes as applied to man: and by the help of those terms we express what we conceive to regulate the actions of God in the moral government of the universe. In like manner, when we speak of any thing being "an abomination" or "a delight" to God, we mean only, that he will act in reference to that thing as we should towards any thing which excited such feelings in our minds. This is clearly understood by all. No man needs to be informed, that

that God is not susceptible of such feelings, or capable of those emotions which such feelings import: we therefore, in conformity with Scripture, shall proceed to speak of God in the same figurative language: and we pray God that your minds may be suitably impressed by it, whilst we consider,

I. The truths here asserted—

1. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord"—

[Where so strong an assertion is used in reference to any character, it is obvious, that we ought to understand, very clearly and distinctly, who they are that are designated by that character. For instance, suppose that under this general term, "the wicked," we were to comprehend those only who are grossly and openly immoral, we should release all others from any participation in the feelings which the assertion respecting them is intended to create. But this we cannot do: for Solomon himself has accurately defined the character which he is here speaking of; and after defining it, has annexed to that very definition the same declaration as occurs in my text: "*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law,* even HIS prayer shall be abomination[a]." You will observe then, that the wicked is one who is inattentive to the commands of God in his word, and *averse to comply with the requisitions of his Law and of his Gospel*[b]— — —

Now such an one, even though he be guilty of no flagrant sins, is an abomination to the Lord. *The rebellious state of his mind* is most offensive to God: and therefore every thing that he does is hateful to him: "A high look, and a proud heart, and even the ploughing of *the wicked,* is sin[c]." No act can be more innocent than that of ploughing: but *the most innocent acts* of such a person participate in the guilt of his general state and habit of his mind.

His most religious acts too are hateful to God: his very "sacrifices" are an abomination. In the first chapter of Isaiah's prophecies, the Jews are represented as bringing *the offerings appointed* by the Law, as bringing *the best* too, and *in great number,* and *at the seasons ordained* by God himself; and as accompanying those sacrifices with fervent prayer; and yet as being, at the same time, objects of God's utter abhorrence, because their conduct was altogether at variance with their professions[d]. In another chapter he speaks of them as "taking delight in approaching to God," and as abounding in the self-

[a] Prov. xxviii. 9.

[b] This distinction should be more fully opened, in order that *all* may know how deeply they are interested in what follows.

[c] Prov. xxi. 4. [d] Isai. i. 11—13.

self-denying exercises of fasting and prayer; and yet as altogether hateful in his sight[e]. The prophet Amos speaks strongly to the same effect[f]. To what an extent the services of such persons are abhorred, God himself has told us: "He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man: he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck: he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood: he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol." I pray you, Brethren, to mark these expressions, and to apply them to yourselves whilst living in an unhumbled and unconverted state: for, "whilst you regard *any* iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear, you[g]:" your very prayers are turned into sin.]

2. "But the prayer of the upright is God's delight"—

["The upright" is he who truly and unfeignedly gives himself up to God, to be saved in his appointed way,———and serve him with a pure heart and mind———Of such an one God approves: and both his person and his services are accepted of him: "The prayer of such an one is God's *delight*." In itself it may be no more than a few broken accents, or a desire expressed only in sighs and groans: but it enters into the ears of the Lord of Hosts, and shall be answered by him to the full extent of its import. It is, in reality, the voice of his own Spirit in the suppliant: and as "he knows the mind of the Spirit," so he cannot but delight in every petition that is dictated by him[h]. Besides, in the prayer of the upright there are dispositions exercised, which are "in the sight of God of great price[i]." The suppliant himself perhaps is mourning as though he could never hope for acceptance: but God listens to him with unspeakable delight: he loves "the prayer that goeth not out of feigned lips[k]:" above all, he delights in the prayer of the upright, because it gives scope for the exercise of love and mercy towards the poor suppliant, and for a rich communication of all spiritual blessings to his soul. God "will be inquired of by his people[l]," before he will impart to them his promised blessings: and the moment they do pray to him, he is like a mother that hears the cry of her beloved infant, whom she instantly presses to her bosom, and in administering to whose necessities she finds relief, as it were, to her own soul. See this exemplified in his dealings with repenting Ephraim: "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised

[e] Isai. lviii. 2.

[f] Am. v. 21—23. This and the two preceding quotations should be recited at full length, and with the emphasis due to them.

[g] Ps. lxvi. 18. [h] Rom. viii. 26, 27. [i] 1 Pet. iii. 4.

[k] Ps. xvii. 1. [l] Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." "Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: yea, my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord[m]." Here we see a true picture of what every upright soul shall experience. Let us not only be "Israelites indeed, and without guile; and our blessed Saviour will see us under the fig-tree," or in our most secret retirements, and visit us in due season with the most endeared expressions of his love[n].]

Such are the truths asserted in our text. We now proceed to suggest,

II. Some obvious deductions from them—

From these truths it is evident,

1. That God's views of sin are widely different from those of men—

[Men, if free from gross sin, imagine, that they have little cause for self-reproach. They see no evil in the general course of this world: the pleasures, the gaieties, the amusements of it, are all accounted innocent; and if a man perform respectably the different offices of social life, they think he has nothing to apprehend in the eternal world. But "God's thoughts are widely different from theirs." We will suppose, for argument sake, that there is nothing flagrantly sinful in conviviality, and a round of pleasurable amusements; yet inasmuch as such a state argues a departure of the soul from God, and strengthens its habit of rebellion against him, it is highly sinful; and should be so esteemed by all who would not deceive their own souls. For, if the very best actions of such persons are hateful to God, if the very sacrifices with which they attempt to honour him are an abomination in his sight, what must those actions be which have no respect to him, but which tend to banish him from their thoughts, and from the world? I tell you, Brethren, that "to walk according to the course of this world, is to walk according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience[o]." You cannot be of the world and of Jesus Christ at the same time[p]: "you cannot serve God and Mammon too[q]." You may as well imagine light can have communion with darkness, and Christ with Belial, as that a person truly "upright" and believing, can find pleasure in the society of "the wicked" and unbelieving[r]. "The friendship of the world is" essentially, as well as constructively, a state of "enmity against God.

[m] Jer. xxxi. 18—20. [n] John i. 47—51. [o] Eph. ii. 2.
[p] John xvii. 14, 16. [q] Matt. vi. 24. [r] 2 Cor. vi. 14—16.

God[s]." Whatever therefore may be pleaded in extenuation of those habits in which the more respectable part of the world are living, they are all, whether social or personal, civil or religious, one continued act of sin, as long as the soul continues alienated from God, and not altogether devoted to his fear: and the man who thinks himself safe because he is in a path frequented by the great mass of his fellow-creatures, will find himself fearfully mistaken the moment he comes to the termination of it[t].]

2. That the provisions of the Gospel are admirably suited to our necessities—

[Here is "a wicked man:" he offers "a sacrifice" to his offended God: that very sacrifice is "an abomination to the Lord." Must the man then be left to perish? No: the Gospel reveals to him a sacrifice which is pleasing and acceptable to God, and which shall avail for the salvation of all who trust in it, even the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, who "presented himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour[u]." Again; Man, though originally made upright, has fallen[x], and become utterly averse to God and his law[y]. As for creating himself anew, he can no more do it than he could create himself at first. Shall *he* then perish? No: the Gospel proclaims to him a promise from almighty God, that "he will give him a new heart, and renew a right spirit within him[z];" so that, as the most guilty may be forgiven through the atonement that has been offered for him, so the most polluted may be "transformed into the very image of his God in righteousness and true holiness[a]." Thus may those who were odious as the fallen angels, become as accepted and as happy as the angels that have never sinned. O! Brethren, when will you study this blessed Gospel? when will you search into it, to find a remedy for your diseases, and a supply for your wants? Behold it is "a fountain opened," and ever flowing for the relief of sinful man: and every sinner in the universe is invited to "come and drink of it, without money and without price[b]." I would that you should no longer be "an abomination" to your God! I would that he should look upon you with "delight," yea, that he should "rejoice over you with joy, and rest in his love, and joy over you with singing[c]!"]

3. That by the heart, and not by the mere acts, will God form his estimate of us in the last day—

[I know that our actions will be brought into judgment, and be adduced as evidences of our state before God, and as grounds

[s] Jam. iv. 4.
[t] Matt. vii. 13, 14.
[u] Eph. v. 2.
[x] Eccl. vii. 29.
[y] Rom. viii. 7.
[z] Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.
[a] Eph. iv. 24.
[b] Isai. lv. 1—3. John vii. 37—39.
[c] Zeph. iii. 17.

grounds of the sentence that shall be past upon us. But it is not *merely* as acts that they will be either rewarded or punished; but as evidences of the real state of our souls. Even in human judicatories the object inquired into is, the intent of the mind. It is malice prepense that constitutes murder: where that did *not* exist, the act of killing is not accounted murder: but where that manifestly *did* exist, there the attempt to kill, though unsuccessful, has the penalty of murder attached to it. Thus at the bar of judgment, the sacrifices of a wicked man, how numerous or costly soever they were, will be regarded as of no value: whilst the mere sighing of an upright soul shall not lose its reward. Let that then which is chiefly marked by God, be chiefly attended to by us. Let us endeavour to get our "hearts right before God." Let us remember, that, whether evidenced by overt acts or not, he can discern its real state: for "he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins[d]." "To him all things are naked and opened[e];" as the sacrifices of old, when flayed and cut open, were to the eye of the priest who inspected it. "Hell and destruction are before him: how much more then the hearts of the children of men[f]!" "He weigheth the spirits[ff]," and discerns exactly how much there is of every different motive that may operate to the production of every act. Watch therefore, and examine carefully the state of your own hearts: and as "he requireth truth in the inward parts[g]," cease not to pray day and night, that, being "perfect and upright before him," you may have light in darkness[h], peace in death[i], and glory in eternity[k].]

[d] Jer. xvii. 10. [e] Heb. iv. 13. [f] ver. 11. [ff] Prov. xvi. 2.
[g] Ps. li. 6. [h] Ps. cxii. 4. [i] Ps. xxxvii. 37.
[k] Ps. cxl. 13.

CCCCLVIII.

MAN'S ESTIMATE OF HIMSELF AND GOD'S, CONTRASTED.

Prov. xvi. 2. *All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.*

AMONGST the purest joys of a Christian is "the testimony of a good conscience;" and all the labour that can possibly be bestowed on the attainment of it will be well repaid by the acquisition. But we must not forget, that man is a fallen creature, and that his mind and conscience partake of the defilement which sin has brought upon all the faculties of his

his soul. Hence it is necessary to try even the verdict of conscience itself, and not to trust too implicitly to its representations. To "put evil for good, and good for evil; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; darkness for light, and light for darkness;" is, alas! but too common, and more especially in forming an estimate of our own character and conduct. So has Solomon informed us in the words which we have just read: from which we shall take occasion to shew,

I. Whence it is that men have such an over-weening confidence respecting the rectitude of their own ways—

We can know little of mankind, if we do not know, that men of every character and every class go forward in their respective ways with a considerable measure of self-confidence, and self-approbation; and, as Solomon elsewhere observes, that "every way of a man is right in his own eyes[a]." Now whence does this arise? How is it that all, notwithstanding the vast difference there is in their habits and conduct, yet think themselves right? We apprehend that it arises from hence:

1. They judge themselves by a wrong standard—

[Every man has a standard of his own, suited to the views and habits of the class among whom he moves. Some allow themselves in a very great latitude, both of principle and practice; and never condemn themselves, unless they grossly violate the code that is established amongst their own particular associates: they are "clean in their own eyes," as long as they keep within the bounds of purity which their own friends prescribe. Others are far more strict, as Paul in his unconverted state was. "As touching the righteousness of the law, he was, in his own estimation, blameless:" so blameless, as to be quite sure of his acceptance before God: "I was alive without the law once." His very zeal, which was so hateful in the sight of God, and so directly pointed against the Lord Jesus Christ himself, furnished him with a foundation for nothing but self-applause. Though he did not altogether lay aside the law of God in forming his estimate, he used it only to confirm his own delusions, limiting its injunctions to the mere letter, instead of entering into its spiritual import.

[a] Prov. xxi. 2.

import. None but the truly enlightened Christian brings himself fairly to the test of God's holy law: all others have a defective standard; a standard of their own, fitted for their own ways: and this is the first great source of the delusion specified in our text.]

2. They turn their eyes from things that have a doubtful aspect—

[Men, if they suspect that all is not right, are very averse to a strict examination of their case: they content themselves with looking at one side of the question only. Whatever tends to justify their conduct, is dwelt upon with pleasure; but whatever tends to cast a shade upon it, is passed over in silence: "they hate the light, and will not come fairly to it, lest their deeds should be reproved." This is very observable in the conduct of the Apostles, when our Lord touched upon their mutual contentions about worldly preference and distinction: they instantly shifted off the blame, by turning the discourse to another subject[b]. A true picture this of the generality of men, not excepting those of whom better things might be hoped!]

3. They use all possible artifices to obtain a favourable testimony from their own conscience—

[Many are not ashamed to *justify what yet they know* in their consciences *to be wrong*: "It was expedient: it was even necessary under existing circumstances: they were constrained to it, and could not do otherwise." It was in this way that Saul justified his impious intrusion into the priestly office. He cast the blame on Samuel, for not coming so early as he had expected; and affirmed, that, however contrary to the divine law his conduct had been, it was expedient, and necessary, and good; since the Philistines would otherwise have come upon him, before he had sought by proper offerings the protection of Heaven[c]. But notwithstanding all his specious arguments, Samuel told him plainly, that he had "done foolishly," and grievously provoked the Lord to anger[d].

If they proceed not in their self-vindication to this extent, yet they will *excuse what they cannot justify*. "True, it was not altogether right; but they were compelled to do it; and the fault was rather in others than in them. It was done in haste, and without due consideration. It was a mistake; or was done to prevent a greater evil; or to answer some valuable end." Here again we may see in the same unhappy monarch the evil we are speaking of. He had spared Agag, and the best of the flocks and herds, which he should have utterly destroyed: yet, when he saw Samuel, he boasted, that "he

[b] Luke ix. 46—49. [c] 1 Sam. xiii. 8—12. [d] ib. ver. 13, 14.

"he had fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." But, on Samuel's inquiry into the reasons of the flocks and herds being spared, he excused himself, by saying, that he had reserved them for sacrifices: and, when further reproved, he cast the blame on the people, asserting, that *they* had taken of the spoil without his consent or privity[e].

When their conduct is too plainly reprehensible to admit of such replies, they will then *palliate what they cannot excuse.* Satan will never leave them at a loss for something whereby to extenuate their faults, and to silence the reproaches of a guilty conscience. "It was not so bad as is represented: the intention was good: it was done only once, and *that* under circumstances that might well account for it." But there is no end to the suggestions of self-love. There is not a man under heaven, except the broken-hearted penitent, that will acknowledge his faults in *all their real malignity*, and with *all their attendant aggravations.* All will cast some veil over their ways, to hide their deformity, and to make them appear "clean;" and will put such a colour even on their basest actions, as to leave in them scarcely any criminality at all.]

But, whilst we thus varnish over our own ways, so as to make them clean in our own eyes, it is of infinite importance for us to know,

II. How God will form his estimate of them—

Certainly he will not judge as we do: he will scrutinize our actions more narrowly, and will weigh as in a balance every thing that pertains to them. He will weigh,

1. Our actions themselves—

[Every thing we do is put, as it were, into a balance, even "the balance of the sanctuary." God will examine with infallible accuracy what the motives were, and the principles, by which we were actuated; for by *these*; and not by the mere external appearance, must the qualities of our actions be determined. He will examine how much there was of love to his name; how much of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ; how much of humility, of self-denial, of love to our fellow-creatures; and how much of zeal for the honour and glory of our God. Precisely according to the measure of these things will be his estimate of our actions: all else will be only as dross that is blended with the gold, and which the fire will consume.]

2. Our excuses—

[These for the most part, when put into his scales, are found

[e] 1 Sam. xv. 13—21.

found lighter than the dust upon the balance. By means of them we impose upon ourselves, and upon our fellow-creatures; but we cannot impose on him: "he cannot be deceived:" and the very excuses which we urge with such confidence, will be rejected by him with scorn. See how strongly he has cautioned us on this head. He supposes us to have made some rash vow, and then to excuse ourselves from performing it, by saying that we were under a mistake: "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; *neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error*: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands[f]?" It is on this account that we so often meet with this warning; "Let no man deceive you with vain words;" "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." In truth, so far are we from satisfying him by our vain pleas, that the more confident we are in the validity of our own excuses, the more we provoke his wrath and indignation: "Thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me: behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned[g]."]

3. The disposition and habit of our minds—

[It is not so much the transient act that determines our character, as the rooted habit of the mind. This *we* are apt to overlook: and if we see not any glaring faults in our conduct, we think that all is well with us. But God views us as creatures, who by the very law of their creation are bound not to live to themselves, but unto him. He views us too as redeemed creatures, who, having been bought with the precious blood of his dear Son, are bound by this further tie to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his." By this test will he try us; and according to the result of this scrutiny will he determine our eternal state. In particular, he will mark, What degree of candour there is in us whilst examining our own ways; and, Which is our predominant feeling, a *partial* desire to think our "ways clean," or an *impartial* desire to find out every atom of uncleanness that adheres to them. He will further notice what means we are using to ascertain the truth, and to escape from all kinds of self-delusion; whether we candidly consult others who are more impartial than we can be supposed to be; and whether we are crying mightily to Him to search and try us. Both these are necessary; because whilst, on the one hand, we may too easily rest in the favourable opinion of friends, we may, on the other hand, be determinately holding fast our confidence against the judgment of friends, even whilst we are pretending to ask counsel of our God. Truly "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and one of the principal dispositions

[f] Eccl. v. 6. [g] Jer. ii. 35.

positions that God will expect to see in us, is, a holy jealousy over ourselves, and a willingness rather to die than be left under a mistaken confidence of our own purity. Where this is wanting, there is a radical defect in the character; a defect which, if not rectified, will exclude us from the number of true Israelites, whose character is, that "they are without guile."]

ADDRESS,

1. The careless Worldling—

[You will not believe that you are wrong. But consult the Scriptures, and see. Find, if you can, one single word that sanctions a life of carelessness and indifference. To what purpose is it to be saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace?" Did you never hear what God replies to those who "say, I shall have peace, though I walk after the imaginations of my heart?" "The Lord, it is said, will not spare that man; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against him; and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him; and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven[h]." Go on, if you are determined so to do; but know, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting[i]."]

2. The self-righteous Moralist—

[Solomon justly observes, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness[k]." And such is the character of those whom we are now addressing. They are ready to say, "I have kept all the commandments from my youth up: and what lack I yet?" But, like that deluded youth, they lack the one thing needful, namely, "to forsake all, and follow Christ." This they do not: this they will not do: they hold fast their own righteousness, and will not renounce it for an interest in his. Such was Paul in his unconverted state: but when his eyes were opened to see the plan of Salvation revealed in the Gospel, then "he counted all things but dung and dross that he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, but Christ's." Know then, Brethren, that, if you trust in the law, you shall be tried by the law, and suffer all its penalties for your infractions of it: but if you will embrace the Gospel, and seek for acceptance solely through the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall find that "in him you shall be justified, and in him shall you glory."]

3. The professed Believer—

[Much

[h] Deut. xxix. 19, 20. [i] Gal. vi. 7, 8. [k] Prov. xxx. 12.

[Much blindness yet remains within us after we have believed in Christ: and the most eminent Believer still needs to maintain a godly jealousy over his own deceitful heart. The Apostles themselves at one time "knew not what manner of spirit they were of." But where shall we find any amongst ourselves that suspect this to be their own case? Alas! we all are more or less blinded by self-love: and, when most confident of our own integrity, we still need to say with Paul, "I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord[l]." We intreat you to guard with all possible care against the delusions of your own hearts; for they will assuredly, if persisted in, betray you to your everlasting ruin. The express declaration of God on this subject is, "If thou sayest, (in reference to any duty neglected, or sin committed,) Behold, we knew it not; doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? and He that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works[m]?" Yes: His estimate will not be regulated by your opinion of yourselves, but by his perfect knowledge of your real character. May God enable us so to lay these things to heart, and so to act upon them, that "we may be found of him in that day without spot and blameless!"]

[l] 1 Cor. iv. 4. [m] Prov. xxiv. 11, 12.

CCCCLIX.

ERRONEOUS VIEWS OF RELIGION REFUTED.

Prov. xvi. 25. *There is a way that seemeth right to a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

THE testimony of an inspired Prophet respecting the human heart is, that it "is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." This testimony, as far as it respects the world at large, we all are ready to confirm. We see that in the great mass of mankind there is a propensity to deceive, not others only, but themselves also. They are often unconscious of principles, by which they are manifestly actuated; and as often take credit to themselves for virtues, which they do not really possess. Persons who have made considerable attainments in self-knowledge, are yet by no means free from this infirmity: the Apostles themselves, on more occasions than one, betrayed by their conduct, that "they knew not what spirit they were of."

of." Nor does this proneness to self-deceit discover itself only in relation to individual acts, wherein men may be supposed to be biassed either by their interests or passions: it extends itself to men's whole character, and leads them to form a most erroneous judgment of their state: it leads them to "call evil good, and good evil; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness; to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." But it may be thought, that, if a man be deceived by his own heart, a less degree of criminality will attach to his actions, and he will have less reason to apprehend the displeasure of God. This however is not true: for we are responsible to God for the judgment we form of good and evil; and if we err, after all the means of information he has given us, we must be willingly deceived, and abide the consequences of our folly. To this effect Solomon speaks in the words before us: he concedes that "a way may appear right to a man; but he tells us nevertheless, that the end thereof will be death."

This assertion of his is not to be understood of one particular way only: it is a general assertion, that is applicable to a great variety of cases, or rather, I should say, to every kind of way that is followed by man and condemned by God. Of course we cannot enter into all the cases which might be specified: it will be sufficient to notice two or three ways, which are the most commonly followed, and most fatal in their issue.

The *first* way to which we would call your attention is that of *gay licentiousness*.

We cannot suppose any person so ignorant as really to think that licentious gaiety is *right*: but there are millions who do not think it materially wrong. Criminal excesses and indulgences are palliated by the mild appellations of conviviality and youthful indiscretion: and they are deemed necessary to the well-being of society. They are even made subjects of boasting; and persons who through age and infirmity are disabled from pursuing their former courses, will yet repeat them in effect, by glorying in the

the remembrance of them, and encouraging others in the same career. So far from condemning these things in their minds, the generality will laugh at those who are scrupulous enough to doubt the lawfulness of such courses: and if any one were bold enough to bear a decisive testimony against them, he would instantly be characterized by some opprobrious name. To suppose that such indulgences, if restrained within moderate bounds, would subject a man to the wrath of almighty God, would be considered as bordering on insanity: and every one is encouraged to regard such innocent liberties (as they are called) as perfectly compatible with a well-grounded hope of salvation.

Let us then inquire what foundation there is for such a confidence. Does God say nothing in his word respecting the issue of such ways? or does he speak of them in the same gentle terms? No: not a syllable of this kind is to be found in all the Sacred Records. A general caution is given us by Solomon in reference to carnal indulgences of every kind: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment[a]." The general warning given by St. Paul is plainer still; "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die[b]." Lest we should mistake his meaning, he frequently enumerates the works of the flesh: "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; these, says he, are the sins, of the which I tell you before, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God[c]." But because men are ready to offer vain pleas and excuses for such things, he particularly guards us against laying the smallest stress on any surmises of our own, or any suggestions of others: "Let no man," says he, "deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon

[a] Eccl. xi. 9. [b] Rom. viii. 13. [c] Gal. v. 19—21.

upon the children of disobedience[d]." But Moses, and after him the prophet Jeremiah, meet the case in the most pointed terms: "It shall come to pass," says Moses, "when a man shall hear the words of this curse, and shall bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of my heart; the Lord will not spare him; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man; and all the curses that are written in this book shall come upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven[e]."

Now permit me to ask, For what end are these things written? is it merely to alarm and terrify us? Can we conceive that God would falsify, in order to keep us within some decent bounds? Is there any necessity for him to resort to such an expedient; or could he do it in consistency with his own perfections?

Here then we are reduced to this dilemma; either to believe that the word of God is full of the most palpable falsehoods from one end to the other, or to acknowledge that the confidence of ungodly men is unfounded, and their hope delusive. Choose ye the former alternative if ye please: but you must excuse me if I embrace the latter. Believing as I do the word of God to be true, I must believe, and must exhort you also to believe, that they who make light of sin "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The drunkard, the swearer, the whoremonger, in short the careless sinner, may "think his ways right;" but, if there be any truth in the word of God, they shall end in death. The express declaration of God concerning them is, "The end of those things is death[f]."

The *next* way to which I would call your attention, is that of *proud unbelief*. Associated with loose morality will be found, for the most part, a contemptuous disregard of the Gospel. Ungodly men feel no need of it; they see no excellence in it; they consider it as unworthy of their attention; and they leave it as a proper field for the discussion of angry disputants, or the contemplation of wild enthusiasts. If

[d] Eph. v. 6. [e] Deut. xxix. 19. [f] Rom. vi. 21.

If any urge the necessity of faith in Christ, they either contend, that, having been educated in the belief of Christianity, they have all the faith that is necessary; or they cut the matter short, and tell us in a word, "His faith cannot be wrong, whose life is in the right." As to the idea of their salvation depending on the exercise of faith, they cannot for one moment endure it: nothing is too bad to be spoken of so preposterous an opinion: and all who maintain such a sentiment are set down as designing hypocrites, or as gloomy fanatics.

Thus confident are they that their way is right.

But what saith the Scripture to these things? Does God himself lay no stress on the exercise of faith? Does he leave us at liberty to embrace or reject his Gospel as we please? Having given us his only-begotten Son to die for us, and set him forth to be a propitiation for sin through faith in his blood, does he attach no guilt to unbelief? Does he represent the contemners of his Son as in the same predicament with those who receive him? Nothing of this kind can be found in all the book of God. It may be called candour; but there is no such candour in the Inspired Volume. *That* calls every thing by its proper name, and assigns to every thing its proper character: and the unbelief which is thought a matter of so much indifference by the world at large, is declared to be the infallible source of ruin to all who indulge it. But let the Scriptures speak for themselves: "He that believeth on Christ is not condemned; but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God:" and again, "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." In conformity with these declarations is the whole tenor of Sacred Writ: "I am the way, the truth, and the life," says our Lord; "no man cometh unto the Father but by me." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden! and I will give you rest." "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have

have life." To the same effect is the testimony of his Apostles; "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "There is not salvation in any other: there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ."

What now shall we say to these things? Is there any difficulty in understanding these passages? I know, it is fashionable with many to represent the doctrines of the Gospel as so abstruse and intricate that no one of common discernment can understand them. But what intricacy is there here which the most unlettered man in the universe may not understand? Men may invent subtleties on any subject; and on this among the rest: but there is nothing here which is not plain and easy to the most common apprehension. Christ has made an atonement for our sins: and he calls us to seek salvation through his blood and righteousness. He tells us, that "having no sin of his own, he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." And when he sent his Disciples to go and preach this Gospel to every creature, he added, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

What shall we say then? Shall we believe what the Lord Jesus Christ has so strongly affirmed? or shall we believe the surmises of ungodly men, and, as St. John expresses it, "make God a liar?" Even if there were no such strong assertions to guide us, our own reason might tell us, that God, after having given his only dear Son to die for us, would never leave it a matter of indifference whether we believed in him or not: but when we find the testimonies of Scripture so plain and so express on the subject, we must conclude, that the unbelief which men so proudly and impiously justify, will issue in the everlasting confusion of those who harbour it.

The *last* way to which we shall direct your attention, is that of *cold formality*. Many who have respect for the Gospel as a system, content themselves with

with yielding to it a bare assent; and persuade themselves that they receive it aright, even though they never are stimulated by it to any extraordinary exertions. As for all that zeal and love and diligence in the service of the Lord Jesus which they behold in some few around them, they account it all a needless preciseness; and they impute it, for the most part, to ostentation or vanity in those who dare to maintain it. To be regular in their attendance on public worship, to fulfil the duties of their station, and to do unto others as they would be done unto, *this* is enough for them, and more than this they utterly despise. Speak not to them of loving God, of living by faith on the Lord Jesus, of maintaining fellowship with him in the exercise of prayer and praise: speak not to them of walking as Christ walked, of bearing the cross after him, and of rejoicing that they are counted worthy to suffer for him: speak not to them of receiving out of his fulness, of living to his glory, or of growing up into his image: such ideas are quite foreign to their minds: they sound only as the reveries of an over-heated imagination: to aspire after such things would be to be righteous over-much: if such exertions were necessary for the attainment of heaven, what must become of all the world? Their religion lies in a much narrower space; they do as they would be done unto, and they mind their proper business in life: if this will not save them, nothing will: and they have no fear but that, when they shall have finished their course, God will say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

But if these views of a Chrisian's duty be right, whence is it that the Christian course is represented in Scripture as so arduous, that the most "righteous persons are scarcely saved," and with great difficulty? How comes it, that the divine life is compared to a race, that calls for such exertion; a wrestling, that requires such skill; a warfare, that is attended with such labour and danger? What is there, in the kind of

of life which has been described, that at all corresponds with such images as these? If the way to heaven be so easy that people can walk in it without any material difficulty, how comes it that our Lord has represented the path of religion as strait and unfrequented, and has bidden us to *strive* to enter in at the strait gate, because many *seek* to enter in, and are not able? St. Paul, when enumerating many classes of ungodly persons who should arise in the latter days, mentions those who have "a form of godliness without the power;" and in those very words describes the characters which we are now considering. The persons of whom we are speaking, particularly value themselves upon their moderation in religion; as though it were a virtue to love God moderately; to serve our Lord and Saviour moderately; and to seek the salvation of our souls moderately. This was the religion of the Laodicean Church: they determined to guard against all extremes: they would not neglect the service of God altogether; nor would they, on the other hand, engage in it with all their might. And what says God unto them? Does he commend this boasted moderation? No: he says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot! So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Let me not be misunderstood as though I would vindicate any thing that was really enthusiastic: God forbid! The only thing for which I am contending is, that God is to be served, not in a cold, lifeless, formal manner, but with unfeigned delight, and with all the powers and faculties of our souls. We must "yield ourselves living sacrifices to him:" we must endeavour to "walk worthy of him;" and strive to the uttermost to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." This is the holiness to which we are to attain; and "without this holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Having specified some of those ways which seem right

right to the generality of men, but will assuredly end in death, namely, the ways of *gay licentiousness, proud unbelief*, and *cold formality*, we would intreat you to contemplate the state of those who walk in them, at that period when they are about to be undeceived.

Whilst they are in health, and the world smiles upon them, their religion, such as it is, will suffice; and their confidence will bear them up. But when sickness comes, and they draw near to the chambers of death, a doubt will now and then arise in their minds, whether they are prepared to meet their God. To dispel these thoughts, they betake themselves to business or pleasure or company, or perhaps to strong drink; but in spite of all the means used to allay their fears, their suspicions will recur with greater force, and excite a wish to know the opinion of some one better informed than themselves: but they are afraid to suggest their doubts, lest they should create an alarm in the minds of others, and impress them with an unfavourable apprehension of their state. The recurrence of these thoughts makes them cling to life: not that life is pleasant to them; but they are afraid to die. Compelled at last by inward uneasiness, they perhaps put to some friend a question respecting the evidences of our acceptance with God. They are then answered in the most confident manner, that, as they have done no harm, and have been very attentive to their duties in life, they have no cause of fear. The satisfaction founded on such an answer as this, soon passes away; and their former fears return. Now perhaps they would be glad to see some person, whose piety they have heretofore ridiculed as needless preciseness: but they are afraid, lest a conversation with him should confirm, rather then remove, their doubts and fears. They wish, but cannot make up their minds, to send for him. Perhaps they suggest the idea to their attendant, but are dissuaded from encouraging it: they are told with increasing confidence, that all is well with them. Perhaps they persevere in their wishes, and a faithful Monitor is sent for. The servant of God deals tenderly

tenderly with them, but at the same time points out the errors they have fallen into, and the importance of seeking salvation in another way. This disquiets them for a time, and makes them doubly earnest about their souls. The faithful Monitor repeats his visit: but the officious friends have barred the door against him; or perhaps have over-persuaded the dying man to decline all further interviews, and to venture his soul upon his own delusions. Any excuse is offered: the dying man is asleep, or too ill to see any one; and thus the only remaining hope for the poor man is banished. Such consolations as are founded on error and presumption are administered to the last: and at length the disembodied spirit rushes unprepared into the presence of its God.

But who can conceive the surprise and horror of the soul at the instant of its separation from the body? Methinks it shrinks back, wishing if possible to hide itself in its former tenement of clay. But the time is come for it to be undeceived. Now it sees the weakness and futility of all its former hopes. Now it sees how erroneous were its views of sin, and its conceptions of true religion. Now it sees that the representations which God had given in his word were true. The self-deceiver now can no longer doubt to what an end his former ways were leading, or whither they will come who follow the paths he trod. To indulge a wish for another period of probation, or even for the smallest mitigation of his misery, now were vain. Gladly would he go back for a moment to the world he has left, to warn his surviving friends, lest they also come into the same place of torment: but that cannot be admitted. The Sacred Volume is given them for their guide; and if they will follow their own delusions in preference to it, they must abide the consequences. Now despair and anguish seize hold upon him; and he is delivered up a prey to all those horrors, which once he ridiculed as idle tales.

Would we avoid this awful end, let us turn from

the paths that lead to it. Let us remember, that the assertions of men, however confident, are of no value, any further than they are founded on the word of God. Let not their light thoughts of sin lead us to tamper with it, or to doubt its issue. Let not their excuses for rejecting Christ prevail on us to neglect his great salvation. Rather, let us embrace him, and glory in him, and cleave to him with full purpose of heart. Let not their standard of religion be ours: let us go "unto the word and to the testimony:" let us see how Christ and his Apostles walked: and though we be ridiculed as precise and righteous over-much, let us persevere in following the path of duty. Let us "stand," as the prophet speaks, "and ask for the good old way, and walk therein." Let us seek instruction wherever we can find it: and let us remember, that the broad and frequented path is, according to our Lord's express declaration, a way that leadeth to destruction; but that the path to life is narrow, difficult, and unfrequented; for "few there be that find it." In short, let us look forward to the *end* of our journey. At *that* we shall soon arrive; and then it will be of no consequence whether we have been honoured for keeping the world in countenance, or despised for putting them to shame. The only thing that will then be of any consequence, will be, whether we be approved of our God. Let this end then be kept in view: let us regulate our ways in reference to it: and let us both by precept and example endeavour to undeceive the world around us. Then shall we be blessings to the generation in which we live, and shall attain that glory which ought to be the one object of our constant pursuit.

CCCCLX.

GOD IS THE DISPOSER OF ALL EVENTS.

Prov. xvi. 33. *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.*

THOUGH we would not be unnecessarily fastidious in condemning the use of any particular term, where we knew that in its popular sense it was not very exceptionable, yet we cannot altogether approve the use of such terms as 'luck,' and 'chance,' and 'fortune:' for though we know, that the persons who adopt those kind of expressions do not intend to deny *the doctrine* of a superintending Divine Providence, yet we cannot but think, that such language tends exceedingly to weaken *a sense* of God's Providence upon the soul, inasmuch as it excludes his agency from the affairs of men, and regards them as left to mere and absolute contingency. With the Scriptures in our hands, we are perfectly assured, that all things, however casual or contingent with respect to man, are under the controul of a Superintending Providence; or, as it is said in our text, that, "when a lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord."

In confirmation of this truth, we shall shew,

I. That God is the disposer of all events—

Events, of whatever kind they be, are equally under the direction of Almighty God. He disposes of,

1. The things which are most dependent on human agency—

[In the government of kingdoms all the powers of the human mind are called forth and concentrated: but the time for their commencement and continuance is altogether under the direction of a superior power[a]. The success of all human plans, whether relating to military enterprizes[b], or commercial speculations[c], or agricultural pursuits[d], or matters of inferior moment and of daily occurrence[e], depends entirely on him———It was he who directed to Ahab's heart the bow

[a] Dan. iv. 17, 35. [b] 1 Sam. xvii. 45—47. 2 Chron. xx. 17.
[c] Deut. viii. 17, 18. [d] Hagg. i. 6—11.
[e] Prov. xix. 21. 1 Sam. ii. 6—9.

bow drawn at a venture, and to Goliath's forehead the stone out of David's sling. In a word, he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will[f];" and "his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure[g]."]

2. The things that are most independent of human agency—

[Nothing has less dependence on human skill or foresight than a lot. As far as respects the determining of that, an ideot is on a par with the wisest man in the universe. But it is entirely at God's disposal; as all who acknowledge the existence of a Deity have confessed, by resorting to it on emergencies which nothing else could determine. Saul, and all the people of Israel, resorted to it, in order to learn from God who it was that had displeased him; and again, to determine the same matter between Saul and Jonathan his son[h]. In like manner the Apostles had recourse to it, in order to know whom God willed to be the successor of Judas in the Apostolic office[i]. Even the heathens themselves had a persuasion, that, when matters were solemnly referred to Him in a way of lot, he would make known to them the point which they wished to ascertain[k]. But as in these instances the event, though supposed to have been directed of God, might have been casual, since the chances against it were not very great, we will adduce one, which marks beyond all possibility of doubt the Divine interposition; since, in the language of chances, it was above a million to one that the lot did not fall on the person to whom God infallibly directed it[l]. Here is a striking illustration of that passage, "Evil shall *hunt* the wicked man to overthrow him[m]." The hounds see not their prey in the first instance, but trace it by its scent, and follow it with certainty in all its turnings, till at last they come in sight of it, and overtake it, and destroy it. So it was in regard to this pursuit of the man who had troubled the camp of Israel: the lot fell on the right tribe, then on the right family of that tribe, then on the right household, and lastly on the right individual in that household:—and to every human being it speaks in this awful language, "Be sure your sin will find you out."]

That we may see how important a truth this is in a practical view, we shall proceed to shew,

II. That in this character he is constantly to be regarded by us—

His

[f] Eph. i. 11. [g] Isai. xlvi. 10. [h] 1 Sam. xiv. 40—42.
[i] Acts i. 23—26. [k] Jon. i. 7.
[l] Josh. vii. 14—18. There were two millions of people: but in the last lot the *men* only were concerned.
[m] Ps. cxl. 11.

His hand and his will we should trace,

1. In every thing that is past—

[Have we been loaded with benefits? they must be received as from Him, "from whom cometh every good and perfect gift." It matters nothing whether our blessings came to us by inheritance, or were the fruit of our own industry: to God, and to God alone, must they be referred, as their proper source[n]. Have we, on the other hand, been visited with afflictions? We should know, that "they did not spring out of the ground," but proceeded from his gracious hand; since "there is no evil in the city, but the Lord himself hath done it." Thus Job viewed all his diversified trials: he overlooked the second causes, and fixed his eyes on God alone: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away."

Now in all this we see the great importance of tracing every thing to the Lord; for by our blessings we are inflamed to gratitude, and by our troubles are softened to submission.]

2. In every thing that is future—

[If nothing can occur without his special appointment, how safely may we commit to him our every concern; and how confidently may we expect a happy issue of every occurrence! Can we do better than leave ourselves at his disposal? Were it possible that he should err; or that, having devised any thing, he should be unable to accomplish it; or that, having begun to accomplish it, he should through versatility change his purpose, and alter his dispensations; we might then not feel so well satisfied with having every thing subject to his disposal: but when infinite wisdom and goodness concur to direct all our concerns, and infinite power also engages to overrule every thing for our good, we may well dismiss every fear, saying with the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." We may be as composed as Hezekiah was when surrounded by Sennacherib's army[o], or as Elisha, when surrounded by the army of the king of Syria[p]. "Having God for us," we may rest assured, that "none can effectually be against us."]

Let us SEE from hence,

1. The excellency of faith—

[This is the principle which, far beyond any other, honours and glorifies God. By faith we are prepared to receive every thing as from him, and to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Mere reason, though it may acknowledge these truths, can never enable us to realize them: but

[n] 1 Chron. xxix. 14. [o] 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8.
[p] 2 Kin. vi. 16, 17.

11097

but "by faith we see Him that is invisible;" and learn to acknowledge him, as much "in the falling of a sparrow," as in the ruin of an empire. Seek then this blessed principle; yea, seek it in its highest and noblest exercises, that, "being strong in faith, you may give glory to God."]

2. The blessedness of the true Believer—

[Whatever confederacies may be against you, it is your privilege to know, that "no weapon that has been formed against you can prosper." God has said, that "all things shall work together for your good:" and they shall do so, however much you may be at a loss to conceive in what way the good shall be elicited. Only take care that "Christ is yours;" and then you may be sure that all things else are yours[q]. If Christ is yours, all the perfections of God are so far yours, that they shall all be exercised for your good. Having "Christ for your sanctuary," you shall be inaccessible to the fiery darts of Satan: and having "your life hid with Christ in God, you shall, at his second coming, assuredly appear with him in glory[r]."]

[q] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. [r] Col. iii. 3, 4.

CCCCLXI.

THE NAME OF THE LORD A STRONG TOWER.

Prov. xviii. 10. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.*

IN the Proverbs of Solomon we must not expect to find long and accurate statements of Divine truth, nor elevated strains of devotion founded upon it: the scope of the book is rather by brief sentences to fix upon the mind truths already acknowledged, and to shew the excellency of them in their effects. The passage before us is very instructive in this view, namely, as illustrating the blessedness attendant on true piety. But it commends itself to us yet more forcibly, by exhibiting a contrast between the dispositions and habits which religion inspires, and those which are indulged by the whole ungodly world. The text informs us what "the righteous man" does: the verse following our text informs us what the worldling does: the one makes God his refuge; the other trusts in his wealth, or some other idol equally

equally vain: the one founds all his hopes on God, as made known to us in the Scriptures of Truth; the other, on some vanity, that has no title to confidence but "in his own conceit."

It was to mark this contrast that the blessedness mentioned in our text was confined to "the righteous." Solomon did not mean to intimate, that an unrighteous man, if he would flee to this tower, should be shut out: for the most unrighteous man in the universe is invited to come to it; and, like the cities of refuge, its gates stand open day and night for the admission of all who desire to flee to it for refuge. But the truth is, that none but the righteous will run to it: none but they who are sensible of their guilt and danger, and are fleeing in earnest from the wrath to come, will enter in. All others deny the necessity of submitting to so humiliating a measure: they think they are safe enough without it. The believing penitent, on the contrary, is thankful for such a refuge, and is in the habit of running to it on every occasion: and therefore to him, and to him alone, is the security confined.

To elucidate the passage, we will endeavour to unfold,

I. The character of God—

By "the name of the Lord" we are not to understand the mere *word*, Jehovah, as though that would afford us any security. This is a vain and foolish superstition, that has no foundation whatever in the Oracles of God. But, by "the name of the Lord" we must understand his character; as we learn from that expression of David, "They that know thy name," *i.e.* thy character, "will put their trust in thee[a]." Consider then the character of Jehovah,

1. As described by himself—

[God, in infinite condescension, was pleased to make known himself to Moses, and by an audible voice to "proclaim his name[b]:" "The Lord passed by and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands,

[a] Ps. ix. 10. [b] Exod. xxxiv. 5.

thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty[c]." Now we would ask the trembling sinner, What character he would wish Jehovah to bear? Would he wish God in no instance to testify his displeasure against sin, but to treat all men alike, putting no difference between "the guilty" who are going on in all manner of wickedness, and the penitent, who are turning from all iniquity? No: there is not a penitent in the universe that would wish God to act in a way so unworthy of his divine majesty. But if he desire to be assured of mercy to returning penitents, it is not possible that any words he could devise could more richly portray this attribute, than those which God himself has used. Consider them distinctly and separately, — — — and see how constantly they have been verified towards you hitherto, and how abundantly they contain all that you can desire.]

2. As revealed to us in Christ Jesus—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is "Emmanuel, God with us;" and he is particularly called, "The image of the invisible God," because in him the whole character of the Deity is made, as it were, visible to mortal men. He is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" and his whole character is marked in the name given him before he was conceived in the womb[d]. The name "Jesus" is the same with Joshua, or "Jehoshua," that is, Jah Osea, Divine Saviour. What a glorious and comprehensive name is this! All that he has done and suffered for us, and all that he has promised to us, is contained in it; together with his perfect sufficiency for all that he has undertaken to effect. The trembling sinner finds in the very name of Jesus a pledge of all that he wants. Besides, whilst we contemplate him in the whole of his work and offices, we are expressly authorized to apply to ourselves the benefit of them all, and to call him, "The Lord our Righteousness[e]." Follow this idea in all its bearings, and what unsearchable mysteries of love and mercy will it unfold to our view!]

Such being the name and character of God, let us contemplate,

II. The interest we have in it—

It is indeed "a strong tower"—

[Consider every perfection of the Deity: there is not one which is not "a chamber where we may hide ourselves till every calamity be overpast[f]." The wisdom, the goodness, the love, the power, the faithfulness of Jehovah; who that is encompased

[c] Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. [d] Matt. i. 21, 23. [e] Jer. xxiii. 6.
[f] Isai. xxvi. 20.

compassed by them does not feel himself in an impregnable fortress? Truly they are not merely a wall, but "a wall of fire" round about the righteous; of fire, which whilst it protects the fugitive, will devour the assailant——— What a tower too is the Lord Jesus Christ in the whole of his work and offices! Well is he said to be "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall[g]." Yes, "the man" Christ Jesus, in his Mediatorial character, is such "a hiding-place[h]," where no adversary shall "ever penetrate."]

All who run to it shall "be safe"—

[Who shall ever approach "to harm" those who are thus protected[i]? Surely "they shall be kept in perfect peace." They are "safe:" safe from the curses of the broken law; for "there is no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*[k]" ———They are safe too from the assaults of Satan; for "their lives are hid with Christ in God," where Satan can never come[l]——— In a word, they are safe from every kind of evil; for God has said of those who make the Most High their habitation, that "no evil shall befall them[m]"——— The persecutor may touch their body, but cannot reach their soul[n]: they shall sooner be fed with ravens, than be suffered to "want any manner of thing that is good[o]." And if any thing occur that has the semblance of evil, they may be assured that it shall work for their present and eternal good[p]. Like Elisha, they are surrounded with horses of fire and chariots of fire[q]; and any assaults made upon them shall only terminate, as in Elijah's case, with the confusion and ruin of their enemies[r].]

Suffer now a word of EXHORTATION—

1. Study much the character of God—

["To know God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, is," as our Lord informs us, "eternal life." All other knowledge is mere vanity in comparison of this. Without this we have nothing to warrant our hopes or to dissipate our fears ——— "Acquaint then yourselves with God, and be at peace"———]

2. Maintain constant and intimate communion with him—

[You know how a child runs to his parent on every occasion:

[g] Isai. xxvi. 4. [h] Isai. xxxii. 2. [i] 1 Pet. iii. 13.
[k] Rom. viii. 1. [l] Col. iii. 3, 4. [m] Ps. xci. 9, 10.
[n] Luke xii. 4, 5. [o] Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10.
[p] Rom. viii. 28. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. [q] 2 Kin. vi. 14—17.
[r] 2 Kin. i. 9—14.

occasion: do ye in like manner run unto your God. This is the very character of the true Christian; "The righteous runneth unto God as his strong tower." Get to him under every fear, and every want, and every distress: and "cast your care on Him who careth for you"———]

3. Assure yourselves of the safety which you are privileged to enjoy—

[Well may you say, "If God be for me, who can be against me?" See how David exulted in his security[s]!——— and learn like him to glory in your God: for it is God's desire that you should enjoy all possible consolation[t]. Your Saviour has assured you, that "none shall pluck you out of his hands:" lie there then in peace and safety, "knowing in whom you have believed, and that he is able to keep that which you have committed to him"———When he has lost his power to save, then, and not till then, shall any enemy prevail against you.]

[s] Ps. xviii. 1, 2, & xxvii. 1. [t] Heb. vi. 18.

CCCCLXII.

A WOUNDED SPIRIT.

Prov. xviii. 14. *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity: but a wounded spirit who can bear?*

MAN being placed in a world where troubles of various kinds continually await him, he is endued with a firmness of mind suited to the occasion, so that he is enabled to bear them with a considerable measure of composure and ease. Previously to the arrival of afflictions, they appear more formidable than they really are. We should suppose that poverty, and sickness, and pain, and losses of friends and relatives, would produce a permanent depressure of mind: but this is not found to be the case: time soon heals the wounds that are inflicted by them; and habit soon reconciles men to the burthens which they are called to sustain. Where piety is superadded to natural fortitude, and the grace of God is in full activity, a man can support any load, however heavy. What an accumulated weight of afflictions came on Job! yet he not only blessed God for them, but, when his wife urged him to renounce his allegiance

giance to God on account of these visitations, he with wonderful composure answered, "Shall we receive good at the Lord's hands, and shall we not receive evil?"

Yet there are bounds beyond which a man cannot go, without almost miraculous assistance. The spirit, like the body, may be borne down by a weight beyond its strength: and when the spirit, which ought to support a man under all his other trials, is itself broken, he must fall of course.

Now there are many things which inflict so deep a wound upon the spirit, as to destroy all its energy, and incapacitate it for its proper office: and that we may provide an antidote against them, and afford some consolation under them, we will,

I. Consider the case of a wounded spirit—

A spirit may be deeply wounded,

1. By nervous disorders—

[The mind may be disordered, as well as the body, and indeed through the medium of the body: and it is certain that there are disorders which so operate upon the nerves as to weaken and depress the animal spirits, and to sink a man into the very depths of despondency. This is often mistaken for religious melancholy: but it frequently has nothing to do with religion: it is found in persons who never turned their minds at all to the subject of religion: and, as it comes with, and by, a bodily disease, so it ceases with the removal of that disease. But in its effect it is inexpressibly painful, unfitting persons for every duty, indisposing them for all the proper means of relief, and leading them to put away from themselves all manner of consolation. They constrain their kindest friends to apply to themselves that proverb, "As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart[a]."]

2. By great and long-continued afflictions—

[Job himself, who had so nobly sustained all his complicated afflictions, sank at last, and cursed the day of his birth. Nor is it at all uncommon for men of the greatest fortitude thus to sink. To produce this, is the tendency of calamities of any kind, *personal*, *domestic*, or *public*. See the Apostle's caution to the Church of Corinth respecting their conduct towards a member whom they had excommunicated from among them. As they had been formerly too backward to

[a] Prov. xxv. 20.

to punish his offence, so now they were too backward to restore him: on which occasion St. Paul says to them, "Ye ought rather to forgive him, and to comfort him, lest perhaps such an one should be swallowed up with over-much sorrow[b]." Here the grief was purely *personal:* but in Jacob it was of a *domestic* nature. He had, in his own apprehension, lost his favourite son, Joseph; and now he was afraid of losing Benjamin also: *that*, he said, would fill up the number of his sorrows, and "bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave[c]." How many at this day have ground to adopt this complaint, in reference to their children! *Public* calamities, it is true, do not so often press with an unsupportable weight upon the mind: yet have we several instances of their depressing, almost to the lowest ebb of sorrow, persons of the strongest and the holiest minds. How were Moses and Joshua discouraged, when unexpected circumstances arose to render doubtful the ultimate success of their mission[d]! Nor was it a love of life, or a fear of death, that made Hezekiah so extremely dejected at the prospect of his approaching dissolution, but an apprehension of the evils that would accrue to his country in the event of his removal; and that one consideration reduced him to such a state of grief as would in any other view have been utterly unworthy of him as a saint of God[e].]

3. By guilt upon the conscience—

[What terrible effects did this produce on the mind of the traitor Judas! He could not retain the wages of his iniquity, nor bear his own existence; but sought in suicide a termination of the sorrows he could no longer endure[f]. Nor is it at all uncommon for persons who once "made a mock of sin," to feel so bitterly the torments of an accusing conscience, as to be driven by them to habits of intoxication, and even to death itself, as a refuge. Even good men, previous to their having received a renewed sense of God's pardoning love upon their souls, have been brought to such terrors and despondency, as to find within their own souls a foretaste of hell itself. David's experience in this particular is a just, but lamentable, exhibition of this painful truth[g]———]

4. By violent temptations—

[Satan, though he can no longer possess the bodies of men as formerly he did, has yet great power over their souls. "His fiery darts" can inflict the deadliest wound. Paul himself was not able to endure "the buffetings" of that malignant enemy, till, by repeated cries to his Divine Master, he had obtained

[b] 2 Cor. ii. 7. [c] Gen. xlii. 38. & xliv. 31.
[d] Exod. v. 22, 23. Josh. vii. 7, 8. [e] Isai. xxxviii. 13, 14.
[f] Matt. xxvii. 3—5. [g] Ps. xxxi. 9, 10. & xxxviii. 1—8. & xl. 12.

obtained from him augmented supplies of grace and strength[h]. As for Job, though he was a perfect man, yet he sank entirely under the assaults of this great adversary[i]———Even the Lord of Glory himself, when he had assumed our feeble nature, was so exhausted in his first conflicts with Satan, that he needed to have "angels sent from heaven to strengthen him[k]." And in his last hours, when all the powers of darkness made their united assault upon him, he was constrained to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." What wonder then if Christians of ordinary stature be on some occasions unable to bear up under the wounds which he inflicts upon them?]

5. By spiritual desertion—

[This, after all, is the most overwhelming to a pious soul. With the presence of his God a man may bear any thing: but when "God hides his face from him, he must of necessity be troubled[l]." In this respect also David shews us what an insupportable affliction this is, and how impossible it is for the strongest or most pious mind to endure it[m]———But in our blessed Lord himself we see the most awful exemplification of this truth: for when all his other afflictions together had not been able to extort from him one complaint, this forced from him that heart-rending cry, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me[n]?"]

Seeing then that many may be fainting under the agonies of "a wounded spirit," we will,

II. Administer some balm for its relief—

There is no wound that can be inflicted on the soul in this life, which may not, by an application of the proper remedies, be healed. Consider then,

1. There is no affliction which is not sent by God for our good—

[Afflictions, of whatever kind they be, "spring not out of the ground:" they are all appointed by God, in number, weight, and measure, and duration. If it be disease of body, it is he that inflicts the wound: if the trial come from any other quarter, it still is his chastening rod that strikes us, with a view to our spiritual good, "that we may be made partakers of his holiness." Convictions of sin are the work of his Spirit, to prepare us for the final restoration of his favour: and Satan himself, as in the case of Job and of Peter, is restrained by God, so as ultimately to display the triumphs of divine

[h] 2 Cor. xii. 7, 9. [i] Job vi. 2—4. & vii. 2—4, 13—16.
[k] Matt. iv. 11. [l] Ps. xxx. 6, 7.
[m] Ps. lxxvii. 2—4. & lxxxviii. 3—7, 14—16. [n] Matt. xxvii. 46.

divine grace, and to benefit the souls which he endeavours to destroy: and God himself, in the hidings of his face, seeks only so to humble and purify our souls as to prepare us for the fuller manifestations of his love and mercy[o]———

Now it must be granted, "that afflictions are not for the present joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterwards they work the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." "If we be in heaviness through manifold temptations, God sees that there is "a needs be" for them[p]; and that by putting us into the furnace, we shall be purged from our dross, and come out of it as vessels better fitted for his service[q]. Well therefore may the consideration of the end for which they are sent, and of the benefit to be derived from them, reconcile us to the pressure of them, and dispose us patiently to wait for the removal of them. Could Job have foreseen the issue of his troubles, they would have been deprived of more than half their weight.]

2. Our afflictions, of whatever kind they be, will endure but a little time—

[The Apostle speaks of all, even the heaviest afflictions, as light and momentary[r]. Even life itself is but as a shadow that declineth; or a weaver's shuttle, which soon finishes the piece that is to be severed from the loom. And when once this frail life is ended, there is an everlasting termination of all our sorrows. If only we have believed in Christ, and sought an interest in him, we enter immediately into "his presence, where is fulness of joy for evermore." Into that blissful world nothing that is afflictive can ever enter to disturb their peace: "all tears are wiped away from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away[s]." And, as no created evil can then impair their bliss, so no created good can add to it: "The city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to lighten it; for the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof[t]." How little will the transient clouds that once occasioned a momentary gloom be remembered, when our dwelling is for ever fixed in the full splendor of the Sun of Righteousness. Surely we need not be much cast down at trials, however painful to flesh and blood, when we consider that their duration is but as the twinkling of an eye, and that they will so soon terminate in inconceivable and everlasting felicity.]

3. There is in Christ a full sufficiency for every wound—

[We need not go to the eternal world for consolation; for

[o] Isai. liv. 7, 8. [p] 1 Pet. i. 6. [q] Mal. iii. 2, 3.
[r] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [s] Rev. xxi. 4. [t] Rev. xxii. 23.

for we may find it here. What says the prophet Jeremiah? "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no Physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered[u]?" Did we but cry to Jesus, as Paul did, we should find "his grace abundantly sufficient for us." "If we cast our burthen upon him, he would sustain us." See the experiment tried by David, and the account which he gives of the result: how soon was he "taken out of the horrible pit, out of the mire and clay, and a new song was put into his mouth, even praise unto our God[x]!" The very office which our blessed Lord undertook, was that, not of a Redeemer only, but of a Comforter; "to comfort them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for *the spirit of heaviness*[y]." Let all then look unto him, whatever their affliction now be: even though, like David, they were under the depths of dereliction, they shall soon, with him, have occasion to say, "Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my neckcloth, and girded me with gladness[z]."

The Lord Jesus "will not break a bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory:" and, if we confide in him, "our heaviness may indeed continue for a night, but joy shall come in the morning."]

[u] Jer. viii.22. [x] Ps. xl. 1—3. [y] Isai. lxi. 2, 3. [z] Ps. xxx. 11.

CCCCLXIII.

TRUE PIETY IS RARE.

Prov. xx. 6. *Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness; but a faithful man who can find?*

IF we were to apply to every individual of mankind for his own character, and to form our estimate of the world from the aggregate report, we should soon find, that self-knowledge is a rare attainment, and that men are but partial judges in their own cause. Hence it is, that the more intercourse we have with the world, the more we learn to distrust the professions of men, and to suspend our judgment of them, till we have more substantial ground whereon to form it. Some indeed, from seeing unsuspecting youth so often become a prey to designing men, and frankness and candour so often fall a sacrifice to deceit and treachery, have been led almost to expel

charity

charity from their hearts, and practically to reverse its most established laws. Charity would require that we believe every man honest, till we have evidence to the contrary: but they exempt no man from their suspicions, till a full experience of his integrity has constrained them to revere his character. But between the extremes of blind confidence and uncharitable suspicion, there is a medium, a cautious reserve, which prudence dictates, and religion approves. Such a reserve seems naturally, and as it were necessarily, to result from the observation in our text; an observation humiliating indeed to our proud nature, but justified by the actual state of mankind in all ages; and fitly calculated to guard us against an undue confidence either in ourselves or others.

This observation we shall confirm, by shewing,

I. That a profession of goodness is common—

The virtues of truth, honour, integrity, benevolence, friendship, liberality, are claimed by every one as the inherent and characteristic qualities of his heart: and even piety itself is, if men's opinion of themselves be true, an inmate of every bosom. "Goodness" is not only approved by all, but claimed as the property of all:

1. Of the profane—

[They do not indeed boast of their goodness, they will say, as hypocrites do, that "they are as good as their neighbours. It is true, they are not always quite so correct in their conduct as they might be; yea, they are sometimes betrayed into follies which they cannot justify; but they mean no harm; they injure nobody; they have good intentions, good dispositions, good hearts"———The fruit is bad, they acknowledge: but they will have it, that the tree is good.]

2. Of the moral—

[These have some more pretensions to goodness, it may be thought: but their estimate of their own character is scarcely less erroneous than the judgment of the profane. They are observant of many duties; and oftentimes are really eminent for honour and integrity in their dealings. But they omit from their catalogue of duties all that pertains to the spiritual life, and content themselves with a system of heathen ethics. Humility and contrition, faith and love, heavenly-mindedness,

mindedness and communion with God, are scarcely considered by them as forming any part of true goodness: on the contrary, they allow themselves in self-esteem, self-preference, self-righteousness, and self-dependence; and, when full of these hateful dispositions, they will be "thanking God (with the Pharisee) that they are not as other men[a]," and will, in the habit of their minds at least, say to a repenting publican, "Stand off; come not near to me; I am holier than thou[b]." Of these St. Paul says, that "they have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof[c]."

3. Of the unsound professor—

[No one stands higher in his own conceit, than the person who has learned to talk about the Gospel, but not to practise its precepts. Because he has a zeal for some religious tenets, or for his own particular party in the Church, he is ready to conclude himself a true, perhaps an eminent, Christian; though his religion is seated altogether in his head, and has never descended to his heart. He never stops to inquire into his spirit and conduct, or to examine whether his tempers and dispositions accord with those of Christ. It is highly probable that he is guilty of very shameful neglect in many of his social and domestic duties: as a master, he is proud and imperious; as a servant, inattentive and impatient of rebuke; as a parent, remiss in the instruction of his family; as a child, wilful and disobedient to his parents; in conversation, censorious; in dealings, unfaithful; and in the whole of his demeanor, conceited, forward, petulant, morose. Yet behold, this man, because he can *talk* about religion, arrogates to himself the title of good. Truly this man, whatever he may think of himself, belongs to "the generation that are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness[d]." He "professes to know God; but in works denies him[e]."]

But however common a profession of goodness may be, it must be confessed,

II. That a life suited to this profession is very rare—

We have seen what opinion we should form of the world, if we implicitly received men's record of themselves. But, if we apply to those who have been most conversant with the world, what shall we think of it then? Will they not tell us, that scarce any man is at all to be trusted, where his own interests are at stake: that it is scarcely possible to have dealings

[a] Luke xviii. 11. [b] Isai. lxv. 5. [c] 2 Tim. ii. 5.
[d] Prov. xxx. 12. [e] Tit. i. 16.

dealings in any branch of commerce without meeting with numberless frauds and impositions: and that, if you rely on men's professions of disinterestedness and friendship, you will, as soon as you come into any great trouble, find yourself in the predicament of one, "who has a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint[f];" being not only deceived in your expectations of succour, but deriving great pain from your endeavours to obtain it?

Even in reference to these virtues to which all lay claim, and to be destitute of which they would account it the greatest disgrace, we may apply that humiliating question, "A faithful man who can find?" We must not indeed understand this question as importing that no such person can be found; but only, that there are very few. But we must not limit the question to mere heathen virtues: we must extend it to all the obligations, which, as Christians, we acknowledge. Who then is faithful,

1. To his principles?

[As Christians, we profess to lie low before God, to live by faith on his dear Son, to devote ourselves unreservedly to his service, and to seek our happiness in communion with God. But where are they whose lives correspond with these professions? Are they not so few, that they are even "signs and wonders upon earth?"———As for the generality, they will commend departed saints, but revile and persecute the living ones: they will applaud goodness *in general*, but decry and discourage it *in* its most exalted *particulars*.]

2. To his promises?

[In our baptism we all promised to "renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." When we were confirmed, we renewed these promises, and confirmed by our own personal consent the engagements that had been before made in our behalf. If we have attended at the Lord's Supper, we there also solemnly dedicated unto God ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to him; to be employed in his service, and, if he see fit, to be consumed for his glory. And how have we fulfilled these promises? Has the world been under our feet? Have all the desires of the flesh been mortified? Have the service and enjoyment of God been the one business of our lives?———]

3. To

[f] Prov. xxv. 19.

3. To his convictions?

[There is no one so thoughtless or obdurate, but he has at some times a conviction arising in his mind, that he ought to repent, and turn to God, and to stand ready for death and judgment. Even the most advanced Christians feel many secret reproofs in their consciences, and are constrained to acknowledge, that they should be more meek and humble, more earnest and vigilant, more pure and spiritual. But who is faithful to his convictions? Who makes the advances that he *ought*, or the advances that he *might?*———]

Let us LEARN then from this subject,

1. To be jealous over ourselves—

[If there be so much self-deceit in the world, who are *we*, that we should be altogether free from it? Have not *we* a great measure of self-love within us, as well as others? Are not *we* liable to be biassed in our judgment by passion and interest? and is not *our* heart, no less than the hearts of others, "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?" Surely we have need to tremble, when we hear God saying to us, "There is a way *that seemeth right* unto a man, and the end thereof are the ways of death[g]:" and again, "That which is highly esteemed among men, is an abomination in the sight of God[h]." Let us then be on our guard against an overweening conceit of our own goodness: let us bring ourselves to the touchstone of God's word: and let us beg of God to "search and try us, to see if there be any wicked way in us; and to lead us in the way everlasting[i]." "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth[k]."]

2. To seek the influences of God's grace—

[It is no easy matter to be a Christian *indeed*, "an Israelite without guile." We may be free from gross sin, and yet far enough from that state in which we ought to be. Our own efforts (so to speak) may suffice to "keep the outside clean;" but who, except God, can cleanse the heart? None, but he who formed the universe at first, can create our souls anew: nor unless "chosen and called by him," shall we ever be found "faithful" in the last day[l]. Let us, under a full conviction of our own insufficiency, cry mightily unto him; that he would "put a new spirit within us, and *cause* us to keep his statutes and his commandments, to do them[m]." It is "he who must work all our works in us;" it is he alone that can make us "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ!"

3. To value and trust in the righteousness of Christ—

[Who

[g] Prov. xiv. 12. [h] Luke xvi. 15. [i] Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.
[k] 2 Cor. x. 18. [l] Rev. xvii. 14. [m] Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

[Who amongst us would dare to found his hopes of salvation on his own faithfulness? Who is not sensible that he has, in instances without number, been unfaithful to his principles, his promises, and his convictions? If we presumed to stand on that ground, God would say, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." But, if we were not conscious of any unfaithfulness, we still could not venture to make *that* the foundation of our hopes; because we are so ignorant of ourselves, and so prone to self-deceit. We could even then only say with the Apostle, "I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord:" yes, we must then cast ourselves altogether on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Let this then be done by every one of us: and, instead of proclaiming every one his own goodness, let us all humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes, and say with the Church of old, "In the Lord alone have I righteousness and strength[n]."

[n] Isai. xlv. 24.

CCCCLXIV.

NO ABSOLUTE PERFECTION HERE BELOW.

Prov. xx. 9. *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*

THE great characteristic of the Proverbs is wisdom; as that of the Psalms is piety. They were the result of much thought and observation: and the instructions contained in them were such as a father might be supposed to give to his children. Occasionally however, according as his mind had been occupied, the tenor of his observations was varied; and they assumed, what may be rather called, a vein of piety. We suppose, that, when he penned the passage before us, he had been led into some unexpected discovery of the corruptions of his own heart; and from thence had been drawn to contemplate in a more extended view the general depravity of human nature, not merely as evinced by the ungodly, but as manifested by the remains of sin in the most eminent saints. However this may be, his observation is deep, and of singular importance. It is a challenge to the whole world, to find, if they can, a perfect man. Let us consider,

I. The

I. The truth that is here intimated—

There have been, and yet are, persons in the Church of Christ who boast of sinless perfection. But they are awfully deluded. In order to maintain their favourite system, they reduce exceedingly the requirements of God's law; they deny many things to be sin, which most assuredly are sin; and, after all, they shut their eyes against many things which they know to be sinful in their own hearts and lives, but which they will not acknowledge to be sinful, lest they should overturn the system which they are anxious to defend. But it is a certain truth, that no man is sinless in this world. And this appears,

1. From express declarations of Holy Writ—

[Both the Old Testament and the New concur to establish this truth. Solomon, at his dedication of the Temple, expressly asserted, that "there was no man that lived and sinned not[a]:" and more strongly does he elsewhere affirm, that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not[b]." To this agree also the testimonies of the inspired Apostles: St. John says, that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us[c]:" and St. James says, that "in many things we offend all[d]." The whole Scripture uniformly attests this awful truth.]

2. From such instances as are undeniable—

[Among the most distinguished of God's people, were Abraham, and Moses, and Hezekiah, and Paul: yet all of these, even when they had arrived at the summit of human excellence, fell into sin. Abraham, purely through fear, twice denied his own wife, and thereby subjected her and others to temptations, which might have issued in the everlasting destruction of their souls. Moses, the meekest man upon the face of the earth, gave way to wrath, whereby he provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan. Hezekiah, than whom no man upon the whole ever more honoured God, yet yielded to pride and creature-confidence, when he shewed all his treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon. And Paul, after he had preached for twenty years, and attained an eminence in the divine life not inferior to that of any of the children of men, was so carried away by his own spirit under a sudden trial and temptation, that he reviled God's High Priest, which he himself acknowledged

[a] 1 Kin. viii. 46. [b] Eccl. vii. 20. [c] 1 John i. 8—10.
[d] Jam. iii. 2.

ledged to be a violation of an express command. Who then, after viewing these, will "say, that *he* is pure from sin?"]

3. From the confessions of God's most eminent saints—

[Job, previous to his trials, was pronounced by God "a perfect man;" yet, after his trials, confessed, "Behold, I am vile!" Paul occupies a whole chapter in his Epistle to the Romans in describing the internal conflicts of his mind; sin and grace mutually striving to overpower each other, and disabling him from fully vanquishing the one, or carrying into effect the dictates of the other. "In his flesh," he says, "dwelt no good thing:" but there was, notwithstanding all the attainments of his renewed mind, "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members." Will any other then of the children of men say, "I am pure from all sin?" From the *dominion* of sin every saint may affirm that he is freed; yea, and from the *wilful and allowed* indulgence of any. David justly appeals to God respecting his perfect freedom from sin, as to any *intention and purpose* to commit it[e]; as Job also does respecting the extinction of its reigning power: "Thou knowest, that I am not wicked[f]." But, if any man should go farther, and say, that sin was not still living within him, and operating occasionally to the polluting of his soul, he must stand self-convicted, and self-condemned; just as Job has said, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse[g]."]

Such being the state of our fallen nature, it becomes us to consider,

II. The improvement we should make of it—

This truth should never be lost sight of for one moment: it should regulate every feeling of the heart: it should never cease to call forth and to augment,

1. Our humiliation—

[We are sinful creatures at the best; and are in the situation of wretched captives, who, having a dead body fastened to them, were compelled to drag it about, till they themselves were destroyed by its pestilential vapours[h]——— This, it must be acknowledged, is a most humiliating truth, and not unfitly expressed in the general Confession of our Liturgy, "There

[e] Ps. xvii. 3. [f] Job x. 7. [g] Job ix. 20, 30, 31.

[h] See what is said of Mezentius in Virgil; Æn. lib. viii. l. 485—488.

"There is no health in us." Hence, when we are taught to "lothe ourselves for our iniquities and our abominations," we must remember that it is not for the actions only that are long since past, but for the taint also which they have left behind them, that this self-abasement is necessary. So Job thought[i], and so Isaiah[k], and so Paul[l]: and, if we know ourselves aright, we shall find no terms more suited to express our real state, than those in which the prophet Isaiah described the Jews of his day; "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint: from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores[m]."]

2. Our watchfulness—

[A magazine wherein there was a large store of combustible matter that might produce extensive injury by an explosion, would be guarded with all possible care: and can any care be too great, when we consider how many thousand things there are on every side ready to kindle a destructive flame in our hearts, and how incessantly our great adversary is striving to make use of them for our destruction? We know not what a day or an hour may bring forth. We may be as far from thinking of evil as at any moment of our lives, and yet evil may arise from some unexpected quarter, and produce upon us the most painful consequences. We are never safe for one moment, but whilst we are upheld in the arms of our Almighty Friend. We should therefore be continually crying to him, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not!" at the same time that we should be striving continually to "put off the old man, and to put on the new." This is the advice given us by our Lord himself; "Watch, and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:" for however "willing the spirit be" to approve itself to God, "the flesh is weak."]

3. Our gratitude—

[What a miracle of mercy is it, that, with so much corruption about us, we are preserved in any measure from dishonouring our holy profession! The wonder is not that any fall, but that any are "kept from falling." And to whom is it owing that any of us are enabled to maintain our stedfastness in the divine life? is it to ourselves? No: Peter shews us, what we should soon be, if left to ourselves: Satan would soon "sift us all as wheat," if our blessed Saviour did not intercede for us, and give us fresh supplies of grace and strength[n]. Let us then be sensible of our great and unbounded obligations to Him, who has said, that "he keepeth the feet of his saints."

[i] Job xlii. 6. [k] Isai. vi. 5. [l] Rom. vii. 24.
[m] Isai. i. 5, 6. [n] Luke xxii. 31, 32.

saints." Let us bear in mind to whom it is owing, that, notwithstanding the bush is ever burning, it is yet unconsumed: and let us give all the glory of our stability to God, saying with David, "My foot standeth in an even place; in the congregations will I bless the Lord[o]."]

4. Our love to Christ—

[Notwithstanding in ourselves we are so corrupt, in Christ we are accepted, and beloved of the Lord. Washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness, we are presented unto the Father "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; yea, holy, and without blemish." Oh! how "precious" ought this Saviour to be to all our souls! How continually should we go to him, and plunge beneath "the fountain of his blood, which was opened for sin and for uncleanness," and which is able to "cleanse us from all sin!" How should we delight ourselves in him, and "cleave to him," and "glory in him," and devote ourselves to him! Yes, Brethren, this is the tribute which we owe to our blessed Lord. We must "not continue in sin, that grace may abound," but turn from sin because grace has abounded; and, "because He has bought us with the inestimable price of his own blood, we should strive to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his[p]."]

[o] Ps. xxvi. 12. [p] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

CCCCLXV.

THE DUTY OF GIVING THE HEART TO GOD.

Prov. xxiii. 26. *My Son, give me thy heart.*

THIS address, however it may be considered in some respect as delivered by Solomon to his son, must certainly be understood as proceeding from Him who is Wisdom in the abstract, Wisdom personified, even from the Lord Jesus Christ[a]; and as directed generally to all the children of men, but especially to those who regard him as their Sovereign Lord. And though the more immediate object of the address may seem scarcely suited to this view of it, (because those who are possessed even of incipient piety may seem less likely to fall into the snare which is there spoken of,) yet the caution is necessary for youth of all descriptions; and, as a general lesson, it teaches us, that there is no snare whatever into

[a] Prov. viii. 1, 22—32.

into which we may not fall, if our hearts be not given up to God; and that the only sure way of being kept from sin of every kind, is, to give the heart to God.

Taking the words then as addressed by the Lord Jesus Christ to all who acknowledge his paternal authority, we will proceed to mark *the extent and reasonableness of this command.*

I. The extent of it—

To give our heart to God, implies that we give him,

1. The affections of the soul—

[These should all center in him, and in him alone. Him we should desire as our supreme good, and in him should we delight as our chief joy———We should be able to say with David, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee[b]."]

2. The confidence of the mind—

[If there be any thing besides God in the whole universe, on which we rely, we do not really give our heart to him. To trust, though in ever so small a degree, in an arm of flesh, argues a departure of heart from God[c]. We should confide altogether in his wisdom to guide, and his power to uphold us, in his goodness to supply our wants, and his truth to fulfil to us the promises of his word. We should "trust in him with all our heart, and not lean either to our own understanding" or strength: we should consider him as alone able to help us, and as all-sufficient for our utmost necessities.]

3. The service of the life—

[Without this, all else is vain. Obedience is the certain fruit of love to God[d]; yea, it is altogether identified with it: "This is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments[e]." To the man that has given his heart to God, no commandment can be grievous[f].]

The extent of the command being ascertained, we proceed to shew,

II. The reasonableness of it—

To surrender up our whole selves to God, is called by St. Paul, "a reasonable service[g]." And reasonable indeed it is;

1. Because of his right over us, as our Creator—

[God "made all things for himself: all that we are, and all

[b] Ps. lxxiii. 25. [c] Jer. xvii. 5. [d] John xiv. 15, 21.
[e] 1 John ii. 3—5. & v. 3. [f] ib. [g] Rom. xii. 1.

all that we have, was given us by him, to be improved for his glory. How then can we with propriety alienate any thing from him? A potter feels himself entitled to the use of the vessel which his own hands have made: and has not God a right to all the services that we can render him? Of all that have truly given their hearts to God, it may be said, "No man liveth to himself; and no man dieth unto himself: but whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's[h]."]

2. Because of his mercies towards us, as our Redeemer—

[The Lord Jesus Christ has "redeemed us to God by his own blood;" and by this has acquired a new right over us. To this effect the Apostle says, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his[i]." And in another place he gives this as the duty of every man according to the dictates of his most deliberate judgment: "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again[k]." Was he mistaken in his judgment? and are we at liberty to alienate from him what he has purchased at so great a price?]

3. Because of his relation to us, as our Father—

[If we profess to have been born again, and begotten to God by his word and Spirit, then are we yet further bound to him by the relation he sustains towards us: "What manner of love is this, wherewith the Father hath loved us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Can we have learned to cry, Abba, Father, and doubt whether the giving of our hearts to him be a reasonable service? The utmost then we can do to serve and honour him is no more than our bounden duty.]

4. Because of the utter worthlessness of all his competitors—

[What is there worthy to be compared with him? The whole creation is but as "a broken cistern that can hold no water." Shall we then, "for any thing that is in it, forsake the Fountain of living waters?" Survey the choicest blessings that the world affords; and they are all "vanity and vexation of spirit." Are these then to stand in competition with him who is the unfailing and only source of all blessedness? The more we see the vanity of all created good, the more we shall see the reasonableness of giving our hearts to God alone. We

[h] Rom. xiv. 7, 8. [i] 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. [k] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

We must not only not love our father or mother more than him, but must "*hate* every earthly relative, yea, and our own lives also, *in comparison* of him[l]."]

ADDRESS,

1. In a way of affectionate invitation—

[In this view we may take the words of our text, even as an invitation to us from the Lord Jesus Christ to set our affections on him alone. And how astonishing is it that he will accept such hearts as ours! If we of ourselves had presumed to offer them to him, how justly might he have rejected and despised the offering! Yet behold, he solicits it at our hands! And what can such an offering add to him? Does he need any thing from us? or can we add any thing to him? Oh then admire and adore this astonishing condescension; and let him not woo your souls in vain.]

2. In a way of authoritative injunction—

[This command of Almighty God is not to be trifled with. Let none presume to withstand it, or to delay his obedience to it: for if we obey it not, we never can behold his face in peace[m]. Attend to it then; and see that ye obey it in truth. Give not to your God and Saviour a divided heart; for such an offering he will not accept: but give yourselves *wholly* to him; and so shall that promise be fulfilled to you; "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."]

[l] Luke xiv. 26. [m] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

CCCCLXVI.

THE FOLLY OF VAIN EXCUSES.

Prov. xxiv. 11, 12. *If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?*

OFFICIAL influence is a valuable talent: but to use it aright is often very difficult, and painful to the feelings. Hence those who are possessed of it, are apt to shrink back, when the exercise of it is likely to involve them in much trouble; and they will connive at abuses, which they cannot easily prevent. For such connivance they have excuses ever ready at hand; "They were not aware of the circum-

circumstances;" or, "They thought their interposition would be to no purpose." But power and responsibility are inseparable: and the Magistrate who neglects his duty, must give an account of such neglect to God, and have his excuses weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. To succour the needy, and to relieve the oppressed, is a sacred duty, which no man can neglect, but at the peril of his soul: and to deceive ourselves with vain excuses is folly in the extreme.

We shall not however limit our views of this subject to Magistrates, but shall extend them generally to all those excuses which men make for their neglect of acknowledged duties; and shall consider,

I. The excuses by which men deceive their own souls—

None are so hardy as to deny their obligation to serve God: yet the great mass of mankind will plead excuses for their neglect,

1. Of religious duties—

["They have not time to attend to their spiritual concerns." Not time? For what then is their time given them? and what other business have they in comparison of this? But, if they would speak the truth, is not their disregard of religion to be traced rather to their want of inclination to spiritual things———their want of faith in the Divine records———their want of all fear of God, and all concern about their souls?———How vain then their plea of want of time, when their neglect arises from a total alienation of their hearts from God!]

2. Of moral duties—

[The duties of sympathy, of compassion, of activity in succouring the distressed, are mentioned in our text. Now for the neglect of these duties, such as the visiting of the sick, the instructing of the ignorant, the relieving of the needy, and the comforting of the afflicted, men will plead ignorance, inadvertence, forgetfulness, inability. But is there not a great degree of criminality attaching to us, if we do not search out the poor and afflicted, on purpose to alleviate their distresses? ———and is not the true cause of our supineness, that we have no love to our fellow-creatures, no zeal for God, no gratitude for redeeming love?———It is in vain to think that our neglects are venial under any circumstances, and more especially

cially when they originate in cowardice, and sloth, and selfishness.]

Seeing then that such excuses are vain, let us mark,

II. The folly of resting in them—

Were there no God to call us into judgment, our delusions would be of less consequence: but there is a God by whom all our excuses will be weighed; and he,

1. Will judge with truth—

[He looketh not at the outward appearance; "He searcheth the heart and tries the reins," and is privy to the most secret workings of our minds. We may easily deceive ourselves; but him we cannot deceive. See how forcible is the appeal made to us in our text. Can we have any doubt whether he sees our conduct, or forms a correct estimate of it? Let us remember, that "he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart;" and that, whatever our judgment be, his will be according to truth.

2. Will award with equity—

[Here again the appeal is strong, and carries conviction with it. We are sure that "God will judge the world in righteousness," and "give to every man according to his works." "Whatsoever we have sowed, that shall we also reap: if we have sowed to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we have sowed to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."]

Let this subject TEACH us,

1. To be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy—

[We are apt to think that conscience is a safe guide, and that we may rest satisfied with its testimony. But conscience is corrupted by the Fall, as well as all the other faculties of the soul. It is blinded, bribed, partial, and in many instances "seared as with an hot iron." Hence it is that "every man's way is right in his own eyes." Paul thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus; and was applauded by his own conscience, whilst he was sinning against God with all his might. Be not therefore satisfied merely because you feel no condemnation in your own minds; but beg of God to enlighten your conscience, that it may guide you aright, and keep you from those delusions which would involve you in everlasting ruin.]

2. To

2. To live in daily expectation of the future judgment—

[Ask yourselves, not merely, What do *I* think of this or that conduct; but, What would God say to it, if I were instantly summoned to his tribunal? Such a question as this would often lead you to a very different estimate of yourselves from that which you have formed; and the consideration of his recording every thing in order to a future judgment would tend to keep you vigilant in all your conduct. Walk then as in his sight, and be satisfied with nothing which you are not well assured will satisfy him.]

CCCCLXVII.

THE SLUGGARD'S VINEYARD.

Prov. xxiv. 30—34. *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding: and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.*

IF we have an observant eye, and a mind open to receive instruction, there is not any thing in the creation which may not afford us some useful lessons. We may learn as much from what we see, as what we hear; and as much from what is evil, as from what is good. Indeed it is a mark of true wisdom to exact a tribute, as it were, from every thing which comes within our reach, and to suffer nothing to pass without contributing its quota to our stock of useful knowledge. Solomon has set us a good example in this respect: he saw a vineyard that had been shamefully neglected: and instead of turning away from it, as incapable of affording either pleasure or profit to his mind, he set himself to "consider it well, and to derive instruction from it." Surely then we cannot be unprofitably employed while we consider,

I. The sight which he observed—

It is not uncommon to see ground ill cultivated, or business

business neglected: but as persons reprehensible for inattention to their worldly concerns are comparatively few, we apprehend that the remedying of the evils arising from it comes rather within the province of private admonition than of public discussion. We shall therefore take occasion from the text to speak of a vineyard which all ought to cultivate, but which all are too prone to neglect. This vineyard is the soul; which, with the generality, lies,

1. Uncultivated—

[A man possessed of a common vineyard, ought to procure good plants for it, and to water it regularly, and to weed it carefully, in order that it may yield him its fruits of increase[a]. And we have the same labour to perform for our souls. We ought to get it filled with the choicest graces from heaven. We should water it with prayers and tears, and seek to have it nourished with the influences of the Holy Ghost, which, when duly sought, will descend on it as the dew, and distill upon it as rain upon the new-mown grass[b]. We should be daily occupied in pulling up the thorns or nettles that spontaneously rise, and which, if suffered to remain, will materially impede the growth of every good plant. But is there not reason to fear that the greater part of us have shewn ourselves "slothful, and void of understanding?" Have we not been shamefully remiss in our attention to these great concerns? Have not the fruits produced by us, been "grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrah?" Have not unbelief and impenitence, pride and anger, envy and malice, covetousness and impurity, with ten thousand other noxious weeds, been suffered to spring up and grow within us, till they have even "covered the face of the ground?" Alas! the proofs of spiritual sloth are but too evident in us all.]

2. Unprotected—

[Whatever care a man should take of his vineyard, he would lose his labour, if he should forget to fence it in: "the wild beast of the field would soon root it up and devour it." What then can be expected to spring up in our souls, when they are left at the mercy of every enemy that chooses to tread them down? We should long since have fortified them *with holy purposes and resolutions*. These, it is true, can avail nothing, if made in our own strength; but, if made in reliance upon God, they will be no slight barrier against the invading foe. Joshua[b], David[c], Nehemiah[d], Paul[e], found them useful and

[a] Matt. xxi. 33. [b] Josh. xxiv. 15. [c] Ps. cxix. 106.
[d] Neh. vi. 11. [e] Acts xxi. 13.

and effectual for their preservation. We should also have had our souls strengthened *by the grace of Christ.* That would have proved "sufficient for us:" it would have been even as a wall, yea, "as a wall of fire, round about us." Above all, we should have taken care to have them encompassed *by God's holy covenant,* "which is ordered in all things and sure." Inclosed by that, we might defy all the assaults of earth and hell.

But have we been careful thus to protect our souls? Have we not rather left them open to the incursion of our enemies, the sport of every temptation, the prey of every lust?]

Such a melancholy sight should make us doubly attentive to,

II. His reflections upon it—

Solomon was more desirous to benefit himself, than to criminate others, even though their conduct was justly reprehensible. His reflections therefore on the sight which he beheld, were of a general nature respecting the evil and danger of sloth. The state of our souls may well lead us to similar reflections, and convince us that sloth is,

1. Deceitful—

[The slothful man does not intend to involve himself in ruin: he only pleads for *a little* more indulgence of his indolent habits: but, alas! His "*little* slumber" insensibly becomes *a great deal:* his time passes away, and his work is left undone. The rest which he takes, instead of refreshing him, enfeebles all his powers, and indisposes him for action; so that, though he never *intends* to plunge himself into difficulties, he does it most effectually. And how lamentably does an indisposition to spiritual labour deceive us! No man *intends* to destroy his own soul: he only pleads for *a little* more delay, *a little* more slumber: he thinks he shall awake time enough to do all that is necessary. Thus, while he sleeps, the thorns and nettles grow, and seed, and multiply, and take such deep root, that they can scarcely ever be eradicated: in the mean time, every good desire that may at any time have sprung up within him, is choked; and the decaying wall that should protect him falls to the ground. Ah! how many thousands have perished, like Felix, while they were waiting for "a more convenient season!" There has always been some "lion in the way[f]," whenever the time came for labour and exertion; and thus they have lost the only season which the great

[f] Prov. xxvi. 13—15.

great Husbandman had allotted for the performance of their work.]

2. Ruinous—

[The ruin of a man who neglects his farm or merchandize is *gradual* and *irresistible:* his circumstances become more and more embarrassed; and at last he is apprehended for debt, immured in a prison, and reduced to utter "poverty and want." What a picture does this exhibit of a man who neglects his soul! He does not feel the consequences all at once; but "his poverty comes as one that travelleth:" it proceeds *gradually* step by step: it is not one hour, or day, that makes a very great difference to a man that is travelling many hundred miles on foot; but every step in reality brings him nearer to his journey's end: and so it is with the man that indulges spiritual sloth; his ruin approaches, though imperceptibly, every day and hour: but though it comes insensibly, yet it will seize upon him *irresistibly*, even "as an armed man." How glad would many be in their dying hours, if a portion of the time which they have wasted, could be restored to them! How glad would they be if they could recover the seasons they have lost! But death waits not their leisure: when sent, he executes his office, and transmits them, however reluctant, to the tribunal of their Judge. O that we would endeavour to realize these reflections in our minds, that we may not learn the truth and awfulness of them by bitter experience!]

By way of IMPROVING this subject, we will intreat you all,

1. To inquire into the state of your vineyard—

[Look well, and compare your ground with that of others; not of sluggards like yourselves, but of the Apostles and primitive Christians. And do not mistake, as, alas! too many do, weeds for plants (worldliness for prudence, levity for cheerfulness, formality for devotion, or pride and hypocrisy for zeal and piety); but consult those who are able to instruct you, and be willing to have your vineyard weeded, your plants pruned, your wall reared, and your habits of indolence subdued and rectified.]

2. To cultivate it with speed and diligence—

[Had we improved our past time with diligence, how different would have been the state of our souls! O think of the time that is irretrievably lost; and the probable shortness of that which remains! Let not sloth deceive you any more. There is not one amongst us who may not see in his own soul what advances it has made, and what an increase of work it has

has occasioned. Let us be thankful that the period for cultivation is not yet ended: and let us henceforth "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."]

CCCCLXVIII.

RETURNING GOOD FOR EVIL.

Prov. xxv. 21, 22. *If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head; and the Lord shall reward thee.*

THE morality both of the Old and New Testament is the same. Some have imagined, that, because our blessed Lord said, "A new Commandment give I unto you," he has in his Gospel enlarged the duties of his followers beyond what was required by the moral law. But no command of his was new *in itself*, but only in *its circumstances*; as being enjoined from new principles, and illustrated by new examples. Morality does not depend on any arbitrary appointment: it arises out of the relation which we bear to God as our common Parent, and to each other as Brethren: and, irrespective of any express revelation of it, "To love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves," must of necessity be the duty of every child of man. Had our blessed Lord increased the demands of the moral law, either the Law must have demanded too little of us, or the Gospel must demand too much. But neither of these is the case: the requirements both of the one and of the other are the same, as far as morals are concerned. Love is acknowledged to be the fulfilling of the Law, and the great commandment of the Gospel also. But to love our enemies is the utmost extent to which this duty is carried, either in the Law or Gospel: yet is this enjoined, as we see, under the Mosaic dispensation; which is a clear proof, that it is not, as many erroneously suppose, a requirement peculiar to the Christian code. The very words of our text are cited by the Apostle Paul, as inculcating all that Christianity

Christianity itself requires on this head[a]: only there is one point in our text which adds greatly to its interest, and which has determined us to select the original words for our consideration, rather than the Apostle's citation of them.

From the words before us we shall be led to consider,

I. The duty inculcated—

Certainly the love of enemies was never regarded as a duty by any of the Heathen Philosophers. Whatever might be occasionally spoken by them in praise of magnanimity, the love of enemies, and the rendering of good for evil under all circumstances, was never admitted by them as a proper principle and rule of conduct. Such a principle is directly contrary to all our natural sentiments and feelings.

By nature we all are inclined to render *evil* for evil.—

[There is not a child that does not manifest this disposition, as soon as it begins to act: nor is there any one whose own experience will not furnish him with unnumbered proofs, that this is the natural bent of his own heart. Circumstances may indeed prevent us from retaliating injuries in an open way: the person that has inflicted the injuries may be out of our reach; or be too powerful for us to contend with; or be so low, as to be deemed unworthy of our notice. But in our hearts we shall find the vindictive principle strongly operative, disposing us to take pleasure in any evil that may have befallen our enemy, and to decline yielding him any service, which, under the influence of a better principle, we might have rendered him. The man under the workings of hatred scarcely thinks of his enemy but with pain, and with a direct reference to the injuries received from him: and though from want of opportunity he may not retaliate, he has in him the spark, which might soon, by a concurrence of circumstances, break forth into a flame. In proof of this we need only see how this spirit has operated in others; sometimes rankling for years, till an opportunity to gratify itself should offer; and sometimes bursting forth at once into furious resentment. The sons of Jacob, Simeon, and Levi, full of indignation against Shechem for defiling their sister Dinah, formed a plan to murder, not Shechem only, but every male of the city in which he dwelt: and, to put them off their guard, and disable them for resistance, they devised a scheme the most hypocritical,

[a] Rom. xii. 19, 20.

hypocritical, and most infernal that could enter into the heart of man; having succeeded in which, they executed their bloody purpose without pity and without remorse[b]. In Absalom's bosom the determination to avenge the wrongs which his sister Tamar had sustained, and to expiate them by the blood of Amnon, her offending brother, rankled two full years; till by artifice he was enabled to effect his murderous design[c]. More rapid, but not less cruel, was the vindictive wrath of David, when Nabal had refused to recompense his services in the way he desired: he instantly hasted with an armed force to cut off Nabal, and every male belonging to his numerous household[d]. Alas! alas! what is man, when left to the workings of his own corrupt nature? His every thought accords with that Pharisaic principle, "Thou shalt love thy friend, and hate thine enemy."]

But religion requires us to render *good* for evil—

[Every species of revenge it absolutely forbids, even in thought. "Say not, I will do so to him, as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work[e]." To this effect were those ordinances of Moses: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people: but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself[f]." And, "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou must surely bring it back again to him: and if thou seest his ass lying under his burthen, and wouldst forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help him[g]." Thus by the law of Moses the secret alienation of heart was to be counteracted by the exercise of actual kindness and benevolence. But the words of our text are stronger still, and especially as they are cited by the apostle Paul. The idea conveyed by him is, that we must not merely give our enemy bread and water when he needs it, but must *feed him with the tenderness that a mother would her little infant*[h]. O, what a victory does this suppose over all the vindictive feelings of our hearts!

We have a beautiful instance of this recorded in the history of Elisha. The prophet was surrounded by an army of Syrians, determined to apprehend and destroy him. By a power communicated to him from above, he smote them all with blindness, and then conducted them into the heart of Samaria. The king of Israel having gained this advantage over them, would have slain them: but the prophet said, "Thou shalt not smite them; but shalt set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master[i]." Such is the disposition which we also are called to exercise

[b] Gen. xxxiv. 13—15, 25.
[c] 2 Sam. xiii. 15, 28.
[d] 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22.
[e] Prov. xxiv. 29.
[f] Lev. xix. 18.
[g] Exod. xxiii. 4, 5.
[h] Θάμιζε αὐτόν. Rom. xii. 10.
[i] 2 Kin. vi. 21, 22.

exercise towards our most inveterate enemies. We must "bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us[k]." If they should have offended against us ever so often, even seventy times seven, we are still to retain the same disposition towards them, and to manifest it the very instant they express regret for the unkindness they have shewn us[l]. Nor are there to be any other bounds to our forgiveness, than those which the Lord Jesus Christ has affixed to his: we are to forgive others "even as Christ has forgiven us[m]:" and, if we refuse to do so, our doom is sealed: "So also shall the Lord do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses[n]."]

Such is the duty which we are called to perform: but, that we may not be deterred by the arduousness of it, let us consider,

II. The encouragement given us to perform it—

If we act thus, we have reason to hope,

1. That we shall overcome the hatred of our enemy—

[Certain it is, that no enemy was ever yet won by a vindictive conduct. We may, it is true, silence him by power; but we never can gain his affections by any thing but love. And this will, if not always, yet sometimes, prevail; as St. Paul intimates, when he says, "Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good[o]." Indeed, where there is a spark of ingenuousness left, we cannot but hope that such benevolence as this will at last prevail. We have some remarkable instances of this in the life of David. Saul had persecuted him with most relentless and bitter animosity: yet, when David twice had him in his power, and could have easily destroyed him, he spared his life; and by this generosity constrained his persecutor to confess his own extreme injustice, and to take shame to himself for his own malignant and cruel proceedings[p]———Such effects we also may hope to see produced on our enemies. It is well known that metals are fused, not by putting fire under them, but by heaping also coals of fire upon them: and thus shall the hard hearts of our enemies be melted by accumulated instances of undeserved love. True, we cannot convert their souls by this; for nothing but omnipotence can effect so great a work as the conversion of a soul: but we may reasonably expect to appease their wrath, perhaps also to slay their enmity against us:

[k] Matt. v. 44. [l] Matt. xviii. 22. [m] Eph. iv. 32.
[n] Matt. xviii. 35. [o] Rom. xii. 21.
[p] 1 Sam. xxiv. 4, 11, 16—19. & xxvi. 12, 21, 25.

us: and one such victory will be a rich recompence for all the forbearance we have ever exercised, and all the love we have ever displayed.]

2. That we shall be rewarded by our God—

[This is plainly asserted in our text; and to all who conform themselves to the direction before us shall the promise be assuredly fulfilled.

It shall be fulfilled *here*: for such conduct will bring unspeakable peace into the soul. It is said, that revenge is sweet: but with infinitely greater propriety may it be said, that the returning of good for evil is sweet. The one is a malignant pleasure, such as we may suppose Satan himself felt, when he had prevailed, as he thought, against the Lord of life and glory: but the other is such a sacred pleasure as Christ himself felt, when he prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." What satisfaction did David experience, when, in consequence of Abigail's interposition, he had changed his mind in relation to Nabal, and sacrificed his resentment to a sense of duty! Again and again did he bless her for diverting him from his purpose[q]. And we also, whenever love rises superior to resentment, and enables us to render good for evil, shall find unspeakable comfort springing up in our souls.

But the promise shall be yet more fully accomplished *hereafter*. Every act of patient self-denial and of generous love will be noticed by God with special approbation; and, if a cup of cold water given to *a disciple* for Christ's sake shall in no wise lose its reward, much less shall services rendered to *an enemy* for his sake pass unnoticed. St. Peter tells us, that we are called to such trials, and carried through them in a triumphant manner, on purpose "that we may inherit a blessing[r]." But the point is repeatedly asserted by our Lord himself: "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy:" "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven[s]." Let this thought occupy the mind; and the performance of the duty will be a delightful task.]

ADDRESS—

1. Guard against those reasonings which favour the indulgence of a vindictive spirit—

[You will be sometimes inclined to think that the exercise of resentment is necessary; and that if some displeasure be not manifested, your enemies will be emboldened to proceed to still further outrages. But look at the command of God; and, if this be clearly on the side of forbearance and love, say to every contrary suggestion, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me."]

2. Set

[q] 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33. [r] 1 Pet. iii. 9. [s] Luke vi. 37.

2. Set the Lord Jesus Christ before you as your example—

[There are many passages in the Psalms which seem to breathe a spirit of revenge[t]: but these are frequently only prophecies, which might properly have been translated in the future tense; and when they are clearly imprecations, as sometimes they doubtless are, they are spoken in the person of the Messiah, who had a right either to denounce or imprecate judgments on those who obstinately rejected all the offers of his grace. David, when speaking in his own person, manifested the same spirit that becomes us[u]. But David was a fallible man, like unto us; as we have seen in the case of Nabal. Look therefore to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in whom was no sin. When you were enemies, He left the bosom of his Father for you: yea, "when you were yet enemies, he died for you"———I need say no more. Set him before you, and your way will be clear: and, if you look to him for all needful succour, his "grace shall be sufficient for you," and you shall be able to do all things through the strength he will impart.]

[t] Particularly Ps. cix. throughout. [u] Ps. xxxv. 13, 14.

CCCCLXIX.

TRUE REPENTANCE RECOMMENDED.

Prov. xxviii. 13. *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*

THE subject of repentance offers nothing for the gratification of "itching ears." But it must not on that account be overlooked; since, if less interesting than some other subjects on the score of novelty, it yields to none in point of importance. It is the first act whereby a sinner returns unto his God: and it is an act for which the most eminent saint has occasion from day to day; insomuch that in him it assumes rather the character of a habit than an act. In the more grown Christian, it is the warp, whilst every other grace is the woof: whether the colours interwoven with it be grave or gay, this pervades the whole piece, and is, as it were, the foundation of all the rest.

For the advancing of this work in all our souls, I will shew,

1. The

1. The folly of covering our sins—

To conceal our sins from the all-seeing eye of God is impossible: yet

There are various ways in which men attempt to cover them—

[Sin, though it cannot be hidden from God, may be covered from ourselves, by *denial*, by *extenuation*, by *forgetfulness*.

Many, though walking in the habitual violation of the plainest duties, will *deny* that they commit any sin at all. As "the adulterous woman," of whom Solomon speaks, "eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness[a];" so these, in gratifying their sensual appetites, think that they commit no more evil than if they had merely satisfied the demands of hunger and thirst: and, in *their* minds, one sinful indulgence is but a prelude to another, whenever opportunity and inclination concur to call for it. Persons of this description, if they receive only a distant intimation of their state, are ready to reply, even against God himself, just as Cain did, after murdering his brother Abel: "Where is thy brother Abel?" "I know not: am I my brother's keeper[b]?" Thus, rather than they will humble themselves before God, they will deny their accountability to him, saying, "Our lips are our own: who is Lord over us[c]?" But this denial of their guilt will avail them nothing. God will reprove them as he did Israel of old[d]; and will surely visit them with his heaviest indignation[e].

Others cover their sins by endeavouring to *extenuate* the guilt of them. Thus did Adam and Eve in Paradise. Thus also did Saul, after sparing the king of the Amalekites, and the spoil which he had taken, instead of destroying them utterly according to the direction which he had received from the Lord. He first of all asserted that he had executed the Divine command; and that being disproved by the lowing of the oxen, he vindicated himself, asserting, that, in as far as he was implicated in the affair, he had acted under the influence of the people, whom he could not restrain, and dared not to resist[f]. Thus it is also that the generality are acting all around us. They cannot actually deny that what they are doing is contrary to God's revealed will; but they are so circumstanced, that they cannot on the whole act otherwise than they do: the current of the world is so strong against them, that they

[a] Prov. xxx. 20. [b] Gen. iv. 9. [c] Ps. xii. 4.

[d] Jer. ii. 23, 24. This is a fine image to illustrate the insatiable avidity with which the wicked follow their own lusts and passions.

[e] Jer. ii. 31, 35. [f] 1 Sam. xv. 13—15, 20, 21, 24.

they cannot resist it; and, if they err, the fault is rather in those who have led the way, than in themselves, who have only gone with the stream.

But perhaps the most common way of covering sins is by letting them pass altogether unnoticed. Many are not altogether satisfied that their ways are right: but they go on without much thought, and presently *forget* any thing which may have made a slight impression on their minds. Forgetting their sins, they suppose that God has forgotten them also. Of such persons God complains; "They consider not in their hearts, that I remember all their wickedness[g]." Very beautiful is the description which God gives of such persons, by the prophet Jeremiah: "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle[h]." The horse is unconscious of his danger; and so are the mass of ungodly men: "it is a sport to them to commit iniquity;" and, provided it be not of such a heinous nature as to violate the usages of the place wherein they live, they say, "No evil will come unto us[i]."]

But all who thus attempt to cover their sins are guilty of the extremest folly—

[They "can never prosper." Temporal prosperity they may have as much as others: but in their souls they cannot prosper[j].

They cannot *in this world.* They can have no peace with God or in their own consciences; for God has said, "There is no peace to the wicked." They can have no victory over sin: for God will not interpose to deliver them from bonds, which they themselves are pleased with. They can have no delight in holy ordinances, either in the public assembly, or in their secret chamber. They may, like Ezekiel's hearers, be pleased with hearing a man that can play well upon an instrument[k]; but they can have no fellowship with God: for "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, or light with darkness[l]?" They can have no bright and cheering prospects of the eternal world; for they have no evidence within themselves of their acceptance with God, nor any "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light."

Much less can they prosper *in the world to come.* There the impenitent and unbelieving will meet their deserved recompence. No joy awaits them there. They sought not mercy; and therefore they find it not: they came not weary and heavy laden unto Christ; and therefore they have no part

[g] Hos. vii. 2. [h] Jer. viii. 6. [i] Jer. v. 12. [j] Job xxxi. 33.
[k] Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. [l] 2 Cor. vi. 14.

part in the rest which he alone can give: they humbled not themselves; and therefore they can never be exalted.]

Let us now contemplate, on the other hand,

II. The benefit of true penitence—

True repentance consists of two parts; a confessing, and forsaking, of our sins—

[Confession is of absolute and indispensable necessity. We never can humble ourselves aright without it. Nor ought we to rest in mere general acknowledgments: we should search out our sins: we should say, "Thus and thus have I done." We should go farther, and enter into the particular aggravations of our sins, in order the more deeply to affect our own hearts, and to fill our minds with self-lothing and self-abhorrence. Not that God needs to be informed: he knows all our iniquities, and all the circumstances with which they have been attended. But by spreading them all before God, we give the more glory to him as a God of infinite mercy and compassion; at the same time that we prepare our own minds for a due reception of mercy at his hands.

But, besides this, we must forsake our sins. If we hold them fast, it is a clear proof that our repentance is not genuine. Nor must we forsake them *merely* as a man parts with a limb, which, if not amputated, would destroy his life: we may indeed take into our consideration the danger arising from them, as our Lord tells us in the case of "a right hand or right eye," which, if retained, would plunge us into everlasting perdition: but we must regard them as odious, and hateful, and abominable; and long for deliverance from them as we would for deliverance from the most lothsome disorder.

These two, a confessing, and forsaking of sin, must go together. Supposing we could put away our sins for the future, it would still become us to bewail those which are past: and, if we bewail them ever so bitterly, still must we not rest without gaining the victory over them: it is the union of them both that marks true penitence; and]

Where such repentance is, there God will bestow his richest blessings—

[It is said in a subsequent part of this chapter, that "a faithful man shall abound with blessings." And this is true of all who deal faithfully with their own souls and with their God, in bewailing and mortifying their most secret corruptions. This is strongly asserted by all the inspired writers. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon[m]." To such both the faithfulness and the justice of God

[m] Isai. lv. 7.

God assure a perfect remission of all sin[n]. Nor will God delay to manifest his love, when once he sees our souls truly humbled for sin. The self-condemning publican was justified even before he left the spot where his confessions were made[o]. And David speaks of the same truth as realized also in his experience. Whilst he forbore to humble himself, he was kept in a state of darkness and misery: but "as soon as he began to confess his sins unto the Lord, the Lord forgave the iniquity of his sin[p]."

And need we say what "mercy" God will vouchsafe to penitents in the last day? Surely all the manifestations of his love which he gives to them in this world, are but as a twinkling star compared with that full splendor of the Sun of Righteousness, which in that day every contrite soul shall enjoy. The joy of the Father over the returning prodigal, with all the music, and feasting, and dancing, are but faint images of what shall be realized in heaven over every true penitent through all eternity.]

From hence we may LEARN,

1. Whence it is that men know so little of spiritual prosperity—

[Repentance is a work to which we are very averse. If *we* did but occasionally set apart a day for solemn fasting and prayer, and set ourselves more diligently to the great duty of humiliation before God, we should have more delightful visits from him, and richer communications of his grace to our souls ———]

2. How painful will be the self-condemnation of all who perish!

[The promise in our text will then be remembered with unutterable shame and sorrow. What a reflection will it be, "I might have obtained mercy, but would not seek it: God said to me, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity[q];" but I would not deign to acknowledge it. Verily the easy terms on which salvation might have been obtained, will form the bitterest ingredient of that bitter cup which the impenitent soul will have to drink to all eternity.]

3. What obligations do we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ!

[It is through him, and through him alone, that repentance is of any avail. There is nothing in repentance that can merit forgiveness: all the merit is in Christ Jesus, even in his obedience unto death: it is that, which cancels all our guilt; it is

[n] 1 John i. 9, 10.
[o] Luke xviii. 14.
[p] Ps. xxxii. 3—5.
[q] Jer. ii. 12, 13.

is that, which purchases our title to the heavenly inheritance. Whilst therefore we confess and forsake our sins, let our eyes be directed to Him as our only hope, even to him, "in whom all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and in whom they shall glory."]

CCCCLXX.

DANGER OF OBSTINACY IN SIN.

Prov. xxix. 1. *He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

AWFUL, most awful, is this declaration; yet is it most salutary, and worthy of the deepest attention. Many indeed imagine that it is suited only to the dispensation of the Law: but it is no less suited to us under the Gospel. The Gospel does not consist of promises only, but of threatenings also: and St. Paul himself tells us, that "the day of the Lord will so come as a thief in the night; and that when men are saying, Peace and safety, then will sudden destruction come upon upon them as a travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape[a]."

But in discoursing on such a subject, we would exercise all imaginable tenderness: and we intreat all who are here present to lift up their hearts to God, and to implore the effectual assistance of his good Spirit, that they may be enabled to "tremble at his word," and to "receive it with meekness, as an engrafted word, which is able to save their souls."

There are two things here to which we would draw your attention;

I. The character described—

God, with much patience and long-suffering, reproves the sinners of mankind—

[In a variety of ways he administers reproof. At all times he speaks, silently indeed, but powerfully, to men in *his word*. Every sin is there depicted in its proper colours, and marked as an object of his righteous indignation. There especially

[a] 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

especially we hear him denouncing his judgments against impenitence and unbelief: "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish:" "He that believeth not, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." There too do we find him requiring of us, that we become "new creatures in Christ Jesus;" and declaring, that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In short, every thing that is necessary for us either to know or do, is there revealed——and in every part of it God himself is addressing us day and night———

He reproves us also by *his Providence*. Every one of his dispensations towards us has a voice, to which we should give heed, and from which we may gain the most valuable instruction. Does he summon to his tribunal a neighbour, a friend, a relative? He says to the survivors, "Prepare to meet your God." Does he make a severer inroad on your domestic circle, by cutting off the olive branches that were round about your table, or by "taking away the desire of your eyes with a stroke?" He bids you to seek all your happiness in him alone. By every change of whatever kind he tells you that "this is not your rest." Nor does he speak less by mercies than by judgments. Every gift is sent to draw you to him as the Donor; and every instance of "his goodness and long-suffering and forbearance is intended to lead you to repentance."

Further, he reproves us also by *his Spirit*. Who amongst us has not often heard his still small voice, saying to us, "Repent?" Who has not felt many checks of conscience, when he was tempted to commit iniquity? These have been no other than the motions of God's Holy Spirit within us, testifying against sin, and inviting us to serve our God[b].]

But against his reproofs how often have we "hardened our necks!"

[Many will not endure reproof at all: and, if the word which is ministered to them by the servants of God disquiet their minds, and especially if it strike at their besetting sin, they will vent their indignation against the faithful Messenger who thus disturbs their slumbers. The reproof given to Amaziah was so reasonable, that one would imagine it could not possibly give offence: yet behold, what resentment it kindled in the infatuated monarch! "Art thou made of the king's counsel? Forbear. Why shouldest thou be smitten[c]?"———Nothing could be more just than the reproof which Jeremiah was ordered to administer to the Jewish people: yet the only effect it produced was, to excite their wrath, and to make them threaten him with instant death: "When

[b] Gen. vi. 3. [c] 2 Chron. xxv. 15, 16.

"When Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, then the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die[d]"———Herod went further still, and actually put the greatest of all the Prophets to death, for no other fault than that of telling him that he should not persevere in his adulterous commerce with his brother Philip's wife[e]. Thus it is at this day. Men indeed cannot proceed to such extremities against their reprovers now as they did in former times; but the world's enmity is the same against all who "testify of it that the works thereof are evil;" and it is owing to the protection of the laws, rather than to any diminution of men's hatred against the truth, that contempt only, and not death, is the portion of God's faithful servants.

But it is not only in a way of outward opposition that men manifest their obduracy. Many who externally approve of the faithful Ministry of the word, are in reality as averse to it in their hearts. They hear the word perhaps even with pleasure, as Ezekiel's hearers did; but they will not do it[f]. Say whether this be not the case with many amongst you: you have had the whole counsel of God declared unto you; but have you complied with it? Are you truly brought to the foot of the cross, in deep humiliation, in earnest prayer, and in a simple reliance on the blood of Jesus as your only hope?———Have you also taken his yoke upon you, so that you are daily and hourly fulfilling his will, and regarding his service as perfect freedom? Are you dying daily to the world, and living altogether as pilgrims and sojourners here, having your conversation in heaven, and looking forward to the second advent of your Lord as the consummation and completion of your bliss? If you be not thus brought to live unto your God, you have not yet complied with his reproofs: and, if you are speaking peace to yourselves in such a state, then are you hardening your necks against him. In words indeed you call him Lord, Lord: but whilst you do not the things which he says, you are still among the number of those to whom he will say, "Depart from me; I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity"———]

Having then seen the character that is described in our text, let us consider,

II. The judgment denounced against him—

What but destruction can await such a character, even "destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?" Yes, this is the judgment

[d] Jer. xxvi. 2—8. [e] Matt. xiv. 3—10. [f] Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

judgment denounced against him; and his destruction, whenever it shall arrive, shall be,

1. Sudden—

[Not unfrequently does God mark by some signal judgment those who have obstinately withstood his warnings and invitations. The Ante-diluvian infidels, who would not be reclaimed by the ministry of Noah, were swept away, as soon as ever their day of grace was ended; as were Pharaoh also, and all his host, when they proudly set themselves in array against the Majesty of heaven. Ananias and Sapphira were also made examples of God's indignation against wilful and deliberate sin.

But though death should come upon us gradually, as it respects the body, it may, as far as it respects our preparation for it, be altogether instantaneous. The effect of wilful sin is, to harden the heart, and to render us more and more indisposed for repentance. It also grieves the Holy Spirit of God, and provokes him to withdraw those gracious influences which he has hitherto vouchsafed. When delaying our repentance, we are apt to fancy that we shall in a time of sickness have such a favourable opportunity for spiritual exercises, as will abundantly make up for all the time that we have lost: but when sickness comes, we find that we cannot realize all our fond expectations: the state of our bodies perhaps unfits us for exertion; and the indisposition of our mind for holy things is become more deeply rooted, so that we cannot relent, or humble ourselves before God. The word of God, when we look into it, is only as a sealed book. The instructions we receive, produce no effect. Even during their full enjoyment of bodily health many are given over to final impenitence, so that the ministry of the word serves only to harden them, and the Gospel itself becomes to them only "a savour of death[g]" ——— God gives them over to judicial blindness, and leaves them to harden themselves in order to their more aggravated condemnation. Thus he dealt with the sons of Eli[h]; and thus he has declared he will deal with us, if we wilfully reject his tender solicitations[i] ——— Thus may death come in its most gradual and protracted form, and yet, as far as respects our souls, be as sudden, as if it visited us like a thief in the night.]

2. Irremediable—

[If once God say to his Holy Spirit, "Strive no longer with that man; he is joined to idols: let him alone[k]," the man

[g] See Isai. vi. 9, 10. which is quoted six times in the New Testament. See also Jer. vii. 23—27.
[h] 1 Sam. ii. 25.
[i] Prov. i. 24—31.
[k] Hos. iv. 17.

man is in fact left to irremediable destruction. He will live only to "fill up the measure of his iniquities," and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." But at all events, the very instant that death arrests us, our day of grace is terminated: there is no repentance in the grave; no possibility of passing the gulph that is fixed between heaven and hell: the worm that gnaweth the conscience will never die; the fire that torments the body will never be quenched: the wrath to come will ever be the wrath to come.

What a fearful thought is it, that of those to whom the word of salvation is now preached, many will "come at last into that place of torment," and many, who, like the foolish virgins, once had the lamp of outward profession, and associated with the wise virgins, will, instead of being admitted to the marriage supper of their Lord, be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth!" The Lord grant that none of you may ever experience this doom! yet it is certain, that if you harden your necks against either the precepts of the Law or the promises of the Gospel, this will be your state for ever.

To put you more effectually on your guard, let me]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are indisposed to submit to God's reproofs—

[The word delivered to you, so far as it accords with God's revealed will, is God's, and not ours. We are his Ambassadors; and it is He who speaks to you by our mouth. Indeed, whoever he be that gives you the counsels of true wisdom, he is God's representative to you. Think then, ye who have rejected the counsels of your friends, and the admonitions of your Ministers, what will be your reflections in the last day: when you call to mind the instructions once given by your parents, the advice offered by some pious friend or relative, the warnings delivered by God's servants in the public assembly, how distressing will it be to see that they were only the means of aggravating your eternal condemnation! Oh! let me prevail with you, ere it be too late. Consider, I pray you, "Who ever hardened himself against God, and prospered?" To-day then, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, lest you provoke God to swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest.]

2. Those who are inclined to obey his will—

[Truly this disposition is of the Lord: "it is he that has given you either to will or do." Bless him then, that the destruction which has come suddenly and irremediably on so many millions of mankind, was not permitted to come on you in

in your unawakened state. And now let your hearts be right with him: let every word of his sink down into your ears, and be obeyed without reserve. Seek an entire conformity to his mind and will. "Forget all that is behind, and reach forward constantly to that which is before." Seek to "grow up in all things into Christ, your living Head." Make more and more use of that remedy which is in your hands. Apply the precious blood of Christ more and more to your souls, to purge you from your sins; and seek more abundant supplies of the Spirit of grace, to transform you into the Divine image: so shall you be happy now in the prospect of your inheritance, and be progressively rendered meet for your full possession of it.]

CCCCLXXI.

AGUR'S WISH.

Prov. xxx. 7—9. *Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

IT is the privilege of man to make known his requests to God in prayer, and to solicit from him whatever may conduce to his real good. Even temporal things may be asked, provided it be in subserviency to our spiritual interests, and with entire submission to the Divine will. Who Agur was, we cannot certainly determine; but he was evidently an inspired person[a]; and his prayer in reference to his condition in this world is an excellent pattern for our imitation. He intreated the Lord with very great earnestness; yet he considered his condition in this world as altogether subordinate to his eternal welfare; and therefore in what he asked for his body, he consulted only the good of his soul.

We propose to consider,

I. His request—

Some interpret the former of his petitions as expressing a wish to be kept from error and delusion in spiritual

[a] His words are called "prophecies," ver. 1.

spiritual matters; but we apprehend that the things which he requested were,

1. A removal from the temptations of an exalted state—

[He justly characterizes the pomp and splendor of the world as vanity and lies;" "vanity," because they are empty and unsatisfying; and "lies," because they promise happiness to their possessors, but invariably disappoint them. In this light they are frequently represented in Scripture[b]; and they who have been most competent to judge respecting them, have been most forward to declare them mere vanity and vexation of spirit[c].

Agur doubtless beheld them in this view, and therefore rather deprecated them as evils, than desired them as objects of his ambition.]

2. A mediocrity of state and condition—

[He did not, through a dread of wealth, desire to be reduced to poverty: he wished rather to stand at an equal distance from each extreme; and to enjoy that only which God should judge "convenient for him." It is not easy for us to say precisely what a competency is; because it must vary according to men's education and habits; that being poverty to one, which would be riches to another: yet the line drawn by Agur, seems to mark the limits most agreeably to the mind of God, because it exactly corresponds with the views of Patriarchs[d], of Prophets[e], of Apostles[f], and particularly with the prayer which our blessed Lord himself has taught all his followers to use[g].]

In urging his request, Agur manifested great zeal and earnestness: his whole soul appeared to be engaged in it: we are therefore interested in inquiring into,

II. The reasons with which he enforced it—

He was not actuated by any carnal motives, though he was praying about carnal things. It was not the incumbrances of wealth, or the hardships of poverty that he dreaded; he considered only the aspect of the different states upon his spiritual advancement; and deprecated them equally on account of the temptations incident to both.

1. On

[b] Ps. cxix. 37. & lxii. 9. [c] Eccl. ii. 11. [d] Gen. xxviii. 20.
[e] Jer. xlv. 5. [f] 1 Tim. vi. 8—10.
[g] Matt. vi. 11, and the first clause of 13th, between which and Agur's prayer there is a remarkable agreement.

1. On account of the snares of wealth—

[Riches foster the pride of the human heart, and engender a haughty and independent spirit. This was the effect of opulence on God's people of old[h]; and the same baneful influence is observable in our day. The great consider it almost as an act of condescension to acknowledge God. Scarcely one of them in a thousand will endure to hear his name mentioned in private, or his will propounded as the proper rule of their conduct. The atheistical expressions in the text are indeed the language of their conduct, if not also of their lips[i]. It is on this, as well as other accounts, that our Lord has spoken of riches as rendering our salvation difficult, yea impossible, without some signal interposition of Divine grace[k]. And therefore every one who values his soul may well deprecate an exalted state.]

2. On account of the snares of poverty—

[Poverty has its snares no less than wealth: where its pressure is felt, the temptations to dishonesty are exceeding great. Even those who are in ease and affluence are too easily induced to deviate from the paths of strict integrity, especially when there appears but little probability of detection: how much more strongly then may a dishonest principle be supposed to operate, when called forth by necessity and distress! God appointed that a person suspected of theft should clear himself by an oath before a magistrate[l]; but this was a feeble barrier against dishonesty; for he that will cheat, will lie; and, if urged to it, will rather perjure himself to conceal his crime, than expose himself to shame by confessing it. Thus one sin leads to another; and a soul, that is of more value than ten thousand worlds, is bartered for some worthless commodity. Justly then may that state also be deprecated, which exposes us to such tremendous evils.]

This subject may TEACH us,

1. Contentment with our lot—

[Whatever be the means used, it is God alone that fixes our condition in the world: and, if we be Christians indeed, we may be sure that our lot is that which, all things considered, is most for the good of our souls. If any variations in it have taken place, such changes have been sent to teach us that contentment, which St. Paul so richly experienced, and which it is no less our privilege, than our duty to learn[m]. If we have that which is best for our souls, then we have that which is really best.]

2. Watch-

[h] Deut. xxxii. 15. Hos. xiii. 6. [i] See Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 4.
[k] Matt. xix. 23—26. [l] Exod. xxii. 7—12. & 1 Kin. viii. 31.
[m] Phil. iv. 11, 12.

2. Watchfulness against our besetting sins—

[Every situation of life has its peculiar temptations. Youth or age, health or sickness, riches or poverty have their respective snares. It is our wisdom to stand on our guard against the difficulties to which we are more immediately exposed[n]; and rather to seek for grace that we may approve ourselves to God in the station to which he has called us, than to desire a change of circumstances, which will change indeed, but not remove, our trials.]

3. Solicitude for spiritual advancement—

[It was sin, and sin only, that Agur feared: and doubtless sin is the greatest of all evils. Let the same mind then be in us that was in him. Whether we have poverty or riches, or whether we be equally removed from both, let us endeavour to improve in spirituality and holiness. Then will the wisdom of God, in appointing such a variety of states, be made manifest: and the collective virtues of the different classes will then shine with combined lustre, and, like the rays of the sun, display the glory of him from whom they sprang.]

[n] 2 Sam. xxii. 24.

CCCCLXXII.

THE SELF-DECEIVER EXPOSED.

Prov. xxx. 12. *There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.*

MEN of themselves are very backward to form an unfavourable estimate of their own character. Hence arises the necessity of accurate discrimination and undaunted fidelity in Ministers, whose office is to "separate the precious from the vile," and to give to every one his portion in due season. The Scriptures draw a broad line of distinction between the righteous and the wicked; and *this*, not in their actions only, but in their dispositions and habits; by which the different characters may be as clearly discerned, as by their outward conduct. The generation of self-deceivers is very numerous: multitudes there are who stand high in their own estimation, whilst in God's eyes they are as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Amongst these we must number,

I. The

I. The decent formalist—

He is "pure in his own eyes"—

[He is punctual in the observance of outward duties, both civil and religious. He will attend constantly at the house of God, and even at the table of the Lord: he will also establish worship in his family: and in respect of his dealings with men, he will be all that is amiable and lovely: he will be honest, sober, just, temperate, benevolent: as far as the letter of the law goes, he may be blameless.

In such a state, what wonder is it if he be pure in his own eyes? He understands not the spirituality of the law, and can judge of himself only by the defective standard of heathen morality. By the world he is admired, and held up as a pattern of all excellence: and seeing that he stands high in the esteem of others, he almost of necessity entertains a high opinion of himself.]

But he "is not washed from his filthiness"—

[Much filthiness there is in the heart of every man by nature; and there is a filthiness which every person may properly call *his own*, as being congenial with his own feelings, and particularly connected with his own character. With the character before us there is a very abundant measure of pride, venting itself in a constant habit of self-confidence and self-complacency. Combined with this are impenitence and unbelief: for how is it possible that he should repent and believe, when he knows not the extent of his guilt and danger? "Being whole, he feels no need of a Physician"——— He is altogether under the dominion also of worldly-mindedness. When he has performed his religious duties, he goes to worldly company, without feeling any want, or being sensible of any danger. The friendship of the world is what he delights in as his chief good, never once suspecting, that this very disposition proves and constitutes him an enemy of God[a]. Thus, though there is nothing in him that the world disapproves, and nothing that seems to call for self-reproach, he is under the habitual and allowed dominion of evils, which render him abominable in the sight of God[b]. He has somewhat of "the form of godliness, but none at all of its power[bb]"———]

Amongst this generation we must also number,

II. The Almost Christian—

He goes much farther than the decent formalist—

[He is convinced of the truth and excellence of Christianity, and wishes to be a partaker of its benefits. He will vindicate the faithful servants of God against the accusations brought

[a] Jam. iv. 4. [b] Luke xvi. 15. [bb] 2 Tim. iii. 5.

brought against them by the ungodly world; and will actually comply with many things which the Gospel requires ———

From this partial change in himself he begins to think that he is a Christian indeed. His constrained approbation of the Gospel appears to him to be a cordial acceptance of it: and his slender performances of its duties are in his estimation like an unreserved obedience.]

But, like him, he deceives his own soul—

[He will not renounce all for Christ. When our Lord says, "Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow me," he departs sorrowful, like the rich youth, and chooses the world in preference to Christ. He draws back also from the cross, which he will not bear. He is ashamed of Christ, even at the very time that he shews some regard both for his Word and Ministers. He will not "come out from the world and be separate;" but still remains conformed to it, to its maxims, its habits, its spirit, and its company. Of the same true Christian, our Lord says, "Ye are not of this world, even as I am not of the world:" but of the Almost Christian, the very reverse is true: he strives to reconcile the inconsistent services of God and Mammon: and if this cannot be done, he will forego his eternal interests, rather than sacrifice his wordly interests, and subject himself to the scorn and hatred of the ungodly.

Thus, though pure in his own eyes, he is yet in bondage to the fear of man; and gives a decided preference to this world, before the preservation of a good conscience, and the approbation of his God.]

To the same class belongs also,

III. The inconsistent Professor—

Who more confident of the goodness of his state, than he who professes to believe in Christ?

[The man who has felt some conviction of sin, and some hope in Christ, and has been hailed by others as a sound convert to the Christian faith, is ready to conclude that all is well: his successive emotions of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, are to him a sufficient evidence, that his conversion is unquestionable. If he have some ability to talk about the Gospel, and some gift in prayer, he is still further confirmed in his persuasion, that there exists in him no ground for doubt or fear. More especially, if he have views of the Covenant of grace, as "ordered in all things and sure," and have adopted a crude system of religion that favours a blind confidence, he concludes at once that he is, and must be, a Child of God.]

But who more open to self-deception?

[Professors

[Professors of the Gospel are very apt to forget that rule of judging which our Lord himself has prescribed, "By their fruits ye shall know them[c]." But this is the only safe criterion whereby to judge of our state before God. Yet, when brought to this test, how low do many religious professors appear! They can talk of the Gospel fluently; but, if their spirit and temper be inquired into, they are found to be under the habitual dominion of some besetting sin, as they were before they ever thought of religion. It is lamentable to think what "filthiness there is both of flesh and spirit," from which many who profess the Gospel have never yet been "washed[cc]:" yet an inspired Apostle declares, that "if a man seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, he deceiveth himself, and his religion is vain[d]." What then must be the state of those who yet remain proud and passionate, worldly-minded and covetous, false and dishonest, impure and sensual, yea, and grossly defective in all the duties of their place and station? Truly, of all the people belonging to the generation spoken of in our text, these are in the greatest danger, because their confidence is founded in the idea, that they have already bathed in the fountain which alone is able to cleanse them from their sin.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who, *though pure* in their own eyes, *are not washed*—

[Happy would it be if men would relax the confidence which they are ever ready to maintain of the safety of their state before God. Every one conceives, that whatever others may do, *he* deceives not his own soul: yet behold so great is the number of self-deceivers, that they constitute "a generation!" Beloved, learn to try yourselves by the only true test, your conformity to the will of God, and to the example of Christ———It is in the balance of the sanctuary, and not in your own balance, that you are to weigh yourselves; for in that shall you be weighed at the last day; and if you are found wanting in that, the measure of your deficiency will be the measure of your condemnation———]

2. Those who, *though not pure* in their own eyes, *are really washed* from their filthiness—

[Blessed be God! there is a generation of these also. Many who once wallowed in all manner of filthiness, are now washed from it, even as the Corinthian converts were[e]. Yet they are not pure in their own eyes: on the contrary, they are of all people most ready to suspect themselves[f], and to "loathe themselves"

[c] Matt. vii. 16. [cc] Tit. i. 16. [d] Jam. i. 26.
[e] 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. [f] Matt. xxvi. 21, 22.

themselves" for their remaining imperfections. See how strikingly this is exemplified in the very chapter before us: Agur was a man of unquestionable piety: yet, under a sense of his great unworthiness, he complained, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man[g]." This may appear to many to be extravagant: but it is the real feeling of many a Child of God; I may add too, it is their frequent complaint before God. Such were the feelings of Job, of Isaiah, and of Paul[h]———If it be asked, Whence arises this, that such holy and heavenly persons should be so far from being pure in their own eyes? the reason is, that they try themselves by a more perfect standard, and from their clearer discoveries of the path of duty are more deeply conscious of their aberrations from it. Their love of holiness also makes them now to abhor themselves more for their want of conformity to the Divine image, than they once did even for the grossest sins. To you then, dearly Beloved, I would address myself in the language of consolation and encouragement. It is well that you see and lament your vileness, provided you make it only an occasion of humiliation, and not of despondency. The more lowly you are in your own eyes, the more exalted you are in God's, who has said, that "he who humbleth himself shall be exalted." Let your sense of your remaining imperfections make you plead more earnestly with your God that reviving promise, "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you[i]." And remember, that you are not to wash yourselves first, and then to lay hold on the promises, but to embrace the promises first, and then by means of them to cleanse yourselves from the defilements you lament. This is the order prescribed in the Gospel[k]; and, if you will adhere to it, you shall have increasing evidence that it is the destined path of purity and peace.]

[g] ver. 2. [h] Job xl. 4. & xlii. 6. Isai. vi. 5. Rom. xvii. 18, 24.
[i] Ezek. xxxvi. 25. 1 John i. 9. [k] 2 Cor. vii. 1.

CCCCLXXIII.

THE USEFULNESS OF SCHOOLS OF INDUSTRY.

Prov. xxxi. 10. *Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.*

WHILE we rejoice in the progress of civilization, we cannot but regret the loss of primitive simplicity—

In former days, women of the highest rank did not disdain to employ themselves in the most common offices of life[a]—

King

[a] Gen. xviii. 6.

King Lemuel, supposed by some to be Solomon himself, was exhorted by his inspired mother to select for his wife a woman who was not ashamed to occupy herself in domestic duties—

The description here given of a Queen, is, alas! but ill suited to the refinement of the present age—

It is rather calculated for the lower classes of the community—

With a more immediate view therefore to *their* benefit, we shall consider it, and shew,

I. The character of a virtuous woman—

There is no other character so fully drawn in Scripture as this—

She is described by,

1. Her industry—

[She rises early[b]; and when occasion requires, goes late to rest[c]—

She encourages industry in her dependents[d], and sets them an example of it herself[e], willingly[f]—regularly[g]—without regarding fatigue[h]—]

2. Her prudence—

[She sells the produce of her labour[i]—and lays out her money with judgment for the *permanent* benefit of her family[k]—

She provides comfortably for her family in respect of food[l]—and clothing[m]—

She guards against all waste of her husband's property[n]—

She employs her leisure in improving her mind[o]—

And conducts herself with love and kindness towards all[p]—]

3. Her piety—

[She is not satisfied with performing her duties towards man, but endeavours to serve God also[q]—

She accounts "the fear of God" to be the one thing needful—

She labours above all things to cultivate this divine principle—

She makes it the source and motive, the rule and measure, the scope and end, of all her actions—

And, while she serves her God, she delights also to benefit the poor[r]—]

Of

[b] ver. 15. [c] ver. 18. [d] ver. 15. [e] ver. 19. [f] ver. 13.
[g] ver. 27. [h] ver. 17. [i] ver. 24. [k] ver. 16. [l] ver. 15.
[m] ver. 21. In the margin it is "with *double garments*."
[n] ver. 11, 12. [o] ver. 26. [p] ib. [q] ver. 30. [r] ver. 20.

Of such a character it is not easy to estimate,

II. The worth—

Rubies are accounted valuable among earthly treasures: but the worth of such a woman is infinitely above them—she is,

1. An ornament to her sex—

[However highly beauty is prized among men, the endowments before mentioned render their possessor incomparably more lovely[s]—

The person possessing them must be admired in any station of life—

But her excellence is then most conspicuous and most valuable, when she sustains the relations of a wife and a mother[t]—

It is to be lamented that such characters are rarely "found[u]"—

But the more scarce they are, the more worthy are they of our esteem—]

2. A blessing to her family—

[Of whatever rank they be, they cannot fail to reap much benefit from her prudent management, and pious example—

If they be poor especially, the good arising to them will be incalculable—

They will enjoy a thousand comforts, of which others of their class are destitute—

Their decent appearance will procure them respect, and redound to her praise[x]—

Her children will love and honour her, and bless God on her account[y]—

Her husband will delight in her himself, and make his boast of her to others[z]—

They will all esteem her as a rich and continued source of domestic felicity—]

3. A comfort to all around her—

[The rich will be glad to aid her by their wealth and influence—

The poor will find in her a friend, to counsel them in difficulty, and relieve them in distress—

All who behold her, will be constrained to applaud her conduct[a]—

And many will be excited to follow her example—]

We

[s] ver. 30. [t] ver. 29. [u] *The text.* [x] ver. 23.
[y] ver. 28. [z] ib. [a] ver. 31.

We may now hope for a favourable attention, while we set before you,

III. The tendency of this Institution to increase their number—

Though piety is as common among the poor as among any class of the community, yet it is very rare indeed that we can find among them a combination of the qualities before insisted on—

[From want of education, they know not how to manage their affairs— — —

And from habits of inattention, they are indisposed to learn— — —]

But to the rising generation much good will arise from a School of Industry—

[The instruction which they gain in common schools, is very confined—

But in this they will be taught all that can qualify them for usefulness in this world, or happiness in the next—

To read the Bible, and to fear God, will be proposed as the first objects of their attention—

To qualify them for service, and to fit them to manage their own families at some future period, is the next concern we wish to promote—

To call forth their own exertions, and stimulate a desire to excel, every encouragement will be afforded them—

Thus habits of industry, of economy, of subordination to men, and of piety to God, being formed, they will fill up their future stations in life with far greater advantage to themselves, and benefit to society—]

We will now consider *some objections* that may be made—

1. Among the rich—

[Some think *it better that the poor should be kept in ignorance*—

But these are themselves ignorant, unfeeling, and ungodly—

Some have a fear that *persons may be wanted for agricultural work*—

But there will always be found many who stand in need of employment—]

2. Among the poor—

[These are *unwilling to forego the immediate earnings of their children*—

1. But in a little time they will earn much more than they now do—

2. They

2. They will much sooner find situations where they will live at free cost—

3. They will probably be able at a future period to aid their parents, instead of being a grief, and perhaps a burthen, to them—

4. They will have a far better prospect of heaven, by having their minds instructed, and their conduct regulated, than they would have had, if brought up in ignorance and sin—]

We conclude with recommending the Institution to your support—

[If self-interest alone were consulted, the rich should help forward such Institutions: for, if extensively promoted, they would soon lower the rates. But if benevolence be allowed to operate, it has unbounded scope for exercise in such Institutionsas these; since they render the lower orders of people more intelligent, more useful, more prosperous, and more happy.—]

CCCCLXXIV.

THE CREATURE IS VANITY AND VEXATION.

Eccl. i. 14, 15. *I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting, cannot be numbered.*

THE Book of Ecclesiastes is generally supposed to have been written by Solomon, after he had repented of his manifold transgressions: and it is pleasing to view it in this light: for, if it be not so, we have no record whatever of his penitence. But in this view its declarations are doubly interesting: as inspired by God, they are of Divine authority; and, as resulting from actual experience, they carry a much deeper conviction with them to our minds. Had one of the fishermen of Galilee spoken so strongly respecting the vanity of the world, we might have said that he had never had any opportunity of knowing experimentally what attractions the world possessed: but Solomon had an ampler range for enjoyment than any other human being. As a king, he had the wealth of a nation at his command. As endued with a greater

a greater measure of wisdom than all other men, he could combine all kinds of intellectual pleasure with that which was merely sensual. As having a peaceful reign, he was free from all the alarms and disquietudes of war, and able to prosecute pleasure as the one object of his life. Every species of gratification being thus easily within his reach, he was amply qualified to judge of what the world could give: and yet, after having made the experiment, and "seen all the works that are done under the sun," he pronounced them all to be "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Two things in our text are to be noticed;

I. The general assertion—

Never was any truth more capable of demonstration than this, that the world, and every thing in it, is,

1. Vanity—

[If we view the creature in itself, what a poor worthless thing is it! Take gold, for instance: much as it is in request, it has in itself no value: the value put on it is merely arbitrary, arising not so much from its usefulness to us, as from the scarcity of it. Iron is of infinitely greater service to mankind than gold; and would be more valued by us, if it did not happen that it is to be found in much larger quantities than gold. So it is with jewels: the value of them is quite ideal: in themselves they are of no more use than common pebbles; and he who possesses them in the greatest abundance, is in reality no richer than if he possessed so much gravel out of the pit.

Nor is any thing that wealth can purchase, or any thing that is associated with it, worthy of any better name than vanity. What are high-sounding titles, but a mere sound, that has its value only in the estimation of men; and that, by a change of its acceptation (such as not uncommonly takes place in language, as, for instance, in the term Despot), may convey the most painful feelings, instead of such as are agreeable to the mind? We may ask the same in reference to pleasure: What is it? Let but a very small change take place in the circumstances of the person, and the pleasure shall become a pain. Or let it be enjoyed in all its fulness; Whom did it ever satisfy? To whom did it ever impart any permanent delight? The more exquisite it is, the sooner does it cloy; insomuch that we are soon forced to flee from it through very lassitude and disgust. And a recurrence to the same sources of gratification

fication is far from producing the same emotions in the soul: by use and habit we become indifferent to the very things which once we most ardently affected: so poor, so empty, so transient is all that passes under the semblance and the name of pleasure.

We may say therefore of "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," that it is not only vain, but "vanity" in the abstract: "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity[a]."]

2. Vexation of spirit—

[So far is the creature from affording any real happiness, that it is an occasion of constant vexation to the mind. The pursuit of earthly things is attended with much labour and with much uncertainty as to the attainment of them. When attained, they excite nothing but envy in others, and disquietude in ourselves. By reason of the casualties to which the possession of them exposes us, we are filled with care; insomuch, that those who only behold our acquisitions, often derive more pleasure from them than we who are the owners of them. Besides, the more we have attained, the more our desires are enlarged after something unpossessed; so that our labours are never at an end: and the pain issuing from a single disappointment, frequently outweighs the pleasure arising from manifold successes. Indeed, the things from which we promise ourselves most pleasure, generally become, by some means or other, the sources of our keenest anguish; and our most sanguine expectations usually terminate in the bitterest disappointment: yea, it not unfrequently happens, that after having obtained the object of our wishes, we welcome the period of our separation from it, and bless ourselves more in the loss of it, than ever we did in the acquisition.

Say then whether Solomon's testimony be not strictly true. Young people, when they hear such a sentiment avowed, are ready to think it an effusion of spleen, and a libel on the whole creation: but this testimony is the very truth of God, and shall sooner or later be found true in the experience of every living man: the world, and every thing in it, is a broken cistern, that disappoints the hopes of the thirsty traveller, and becomes to him, not only vanity, but "vexation of spirit:" and he that has most sought to satisfy himself with it, finds after all his labours, that he has only "filled his belly with the east wind[b]."]

Such is the import of the general assertion. We now proceed to notice,

II. The particular confirmation of it—

Two

[a] ver. 2. [b] Job xv. 2.

Two things are here specified by Solomon, as strongly illustrating the foregoing truth; namely, that, however much we may exert ourselves,

1. We cannot alter that which is unfavourable—

[Every man, by the very constitution of his nature, is dependent on his fellow-man for the greater portion of his happiness. The welfare of a whole empire depends on the wisdom and prudence of the prince; as the prince's prosperity and comfort do on the industry, the fortitude, the loyalty of his people. So it is through all ranks and orders of society: all are deeply affected by the conduct of those around them. In the domestic circle, how impossible is it for the husband or wife, the parent or child, the master or servant, to be happy, if those with whom he is more immediately connected be perverse and obstinate in an evil way! Yet all come more or less in contact with unreasonable men: and, however much they may strive to rectify the views, or reform the habits, of such people, they find it altogether beyond their power: they can as easily change the leopard's spots or the Ethiopian's complexion, as they can prevail on persons to change those habits which are productive of so much uneasiness to their minds. Hence, though they form the wisest and most benevolent plans, they cannot carry them into execution, because of the blindness and perverseness of those whose concurrence is necessary for the accomplishment of them[c].

In like manner, there is often an untowardness in events as well as in men. The seasons will not consult us; nor will the elements obey us. Accidents utterly unforeseen will occur, and cannot be prevented by human foresight. Hence uncertainty attends our best concerted plans, and failure often disappoints our most laborious exertions. But these are "crooked things which no man can make straight:" no human wisdom or power can controul them. We have a large and abundant harvest in prospect: but, behold, storms and tempests, or blasting and mildew, or insects of some kind, destroy the whole crop. We have gathered the harvest into our granaries, and a fire consumes it; or an enemy overruns the land, and devours it. We have attained the greatest felicity of which we suppose ourselves capable, by a connexion the most desirable, or by the acquisition of a first-born son. But how soon does death invade our dwelling, and blast all our promised joys! These are but a few of the evils

[c] This may be noticed especially in the opposition made to the diffusion of the Scriptures, which persons of benevolence and piety labour to circulate through the world.

evils to which we are exposed in this vain world; and they stamp "vanity and vexation" upon all that we possess.]

2. We cannot supply that which is defective—

[The rich, the poor, the old, the young, the learned, the unlearned, all without exception, find that there is much lacking, to render them completely happy. Of those who possess most of this world's good, it must be said, "In the fulness of their sufficiency they are in straits[d]." Solomon is a remarkable example of this. He had formed, if not a wise, yet an honourable, connexion with Pharaoh's daughter. Not satisfied, he sought happiness in a plurality of wives. Still not having attained happiness, he multiplied his wives and concubines to the number of nine hundred; and found himself, after all, as far from happiness as ever. Every other thing which he thought could contribute to his happiness he sought with insatiable avidity: but, after he had attained all his objects, he found, that "the things which were wanting could not be numbered." And so shall we find it to the latest hour of our lives. We may fancy that this or that will make us happy; but, when we have gained it, we have only followed a shadow that eludes our grasp. The truth is, that God never designed the creature to be a satisfying portion to man: not even Paradise itself could satisfy Adam: no, nor could the partner which he gave him: he must taste the forbidden fruit: he could not be content without an accession of wisdom, which God did not ever intend him to possess. Thus, even in man's state of innocence, nothing but God could satisfy his soul: nor can any thing, short of God himself, ever be a satisfying portion to any child of man.]

ADDRESS—

1. Set not your affections on things below—

[How happy would it be for us, if we could be content to receive the foregoing truths on the testimony of Solomon, instead of determining to learn them by our own experience! How much vexation and misery should we avoid! But, in spite of the united acknowledgments of all that have gone before us, we still think that we shall find something besides God to make us happy. This however we cannot do, even though we should possess all that Solomon ever enjoyed. We may continue our pursuit as long as we will; but we must come at last to the same conclusion as he, and give the same testimony as to the result of our experience. Be persuaded, Brethren, to credit the Divine testimony, and to spare yourselves all the pain and disappointment which you must otherwise encounter. We mean not that you should renounce

[d] Job xx. 22.

nounce the *pursuit* of earthly things; for you cannot do that without abandoning the duties which you owe to your families and to society at large; but *the expectation of happiness from them* you may, and must, renounce. You must never forget, that the creature without God is nothing; and that happiness is to be found in God alone.]

2. Seek the Lord Jesus Christ with your whole hearts—

[He is a portion in which you will never find any lack: in him is a fulness sufficient to fill all the capacities, and satisfy all the desires of the whole universe. Millions and millions of immortal souls may go to that fountain, and never diminish his exhaustless store. To the possession of him too no disappointment can attach, nor from the enjoyment of him can any vexation ensue. In him all "crooked things are made straight;" and where he is, no want can possibly exist. If you ask of the creature to heal the wounds of sin, to give peace to a guilty conscience, to subdue in us our corruptions, or to cheer us with hopes of immortality, it cannot do any one of these things: no, not even for the body can the creature do any thing to heal its sickness, to assuage its anguish, or to prolong its existence. But the Lord Jesus Christ can do every thing, both for the body and the soul, both for time and for eternity. Seek him then, Beloved; and seek him with your whole hearts. In seeking him, your exertions cannot be too earnest, nor can your expectations be too enlarged. If he give you his flesh to eat, and his blood to drink, you will never hunger, never thirst again, either in this world or in the world to come. Only be able to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his," and then all, as well in heaven as in earth, is yours; according as it is written, "All things are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."]

CCCCLXXV.

DUTY OF PAYING OUR VOWS.

Eccl. v. 4, 5. *When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

THE offering of vows was extremely common under the Mosaic dispensation; and many laws were instituted in relation to them. By them persons bound themselves to the performance of certain

things which were not specifically appointed of God. Some were conditional, and depended on some mercy which should be previously bestowed by God[a]: and others were absolute, and to be performed by the persons at all events. Respecting vows made by persons who were under the government of others, especial provision was made, Under what circumstances, and to what extent, they should be binding[b]. In cases where the vows themselves were not lawful, the person sinned, whether he performed them or not[c]; and in some cases at least, the violation of them was less criminal than the observance[d]: but where they were not in themselves contrary to any command of God, there they were to be punctually fulfilled, and without delay.

We propose, on the present occasion, to consider,

I. The vows which you have made[e]—

These are doubtless very comprehensive—

[The things promised *for* us in our baptism, are contained under the following heads: first, that we should "renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh: next, that we should believe all the articles of the Christian faith: and lastly, that we should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life." In our confirmation we take these vows upon ourselves. Let us consider them distinctly ——— Let us often revolve them in our minds, and cry mightily to God for grace to assist us in the performance of them: for "who is sufficient for these things[f]?" ———]

But the duties to which they bind us are highly reasonable—

[We universally consider children as bound to obey their parents, and servants their masters: but what Parent has such a claim upon us as God, since from him we derive our whole existence

[a] Gen. xxviii. 20—22. 1 Sam. i. 11. [b] Numb. xxx. 3—15.
[c] ver. 6. [d] Matt. xiv. 6—10. Acts xxiii. 12.
[e] This is intended for an Address *after* Confirmation; but may be easily changed to a Preparatory Address.
[f] It would be easy to divide this subject into three or four; closing the first at this place; making the remaining part of this head into a second; forming the second head into a third sermon; and the concluding address into a fourth.

existence and support? "in him we live and move and have our being:" or what Master is entitled to such an unreserved compliance with his will, as God, whom all the angels in heaven obey? God himself founds his claim to our allegiance upon these very principles; "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hosts[g]." And indeed the most unrestricted devotion of all our faculties to his service is expressly called by him, not only an acceptable, but a *reasonable* service[h].]

These duties are binding upon us independently of any vows which we may make respecting them—

[They arise from our very relation to God as his creatures, and more especially as his redeemed people. The Potter is undoubtedly entitled to the use of the vessels which his own hands have formed. Even if our services were ever so painful, we should have no right to complain: "the thing formed could not, under any circumstances, presume to say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus[i]?" But, as we have before observed, the whole of what we have taken upon ourselves is a truly reasonable service; and therefore it would be the height of impiety to hesitate for a moment in giving up ourselves unreservedly to God.

But God has redeemed us also, and that too by the blood of his only dear Son; "We are not our own; we are bought with a price; and therefore we are bound from this consideration also to glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." It is not optional with us, whether we will surrender to him what he has so dearly purchased: we cannot alienate it, we cannot withhold it: whether we make any vow respecting it, or not, we are equally bound to employ all our faculties for God: and the only reason we wish you to take these vows upon you, is, not to increase your obligations to serve him, much less to create obligations which did not exist before, but to impress your own minds with a sense of those duties which are indissolubly connected with every child of man.]

But to bind ourselves to these things by solemn vows is a duty truly and properly evangelical—

[Some would imagine this to be a *legal* act: and if we were to engage in it with a view to establish a righteousness of our own, or with an idea of performing our duties in our own strength, it would then indeed be *legal*: but if, in humble dependence on Divine aid, we devote ourselves to God, it is no other act than that which God himself has specified

as

[g] Mal. i. 6. [h] Rom. xii. 1. [i] Rom. ix. 20.

as characterizing his people under the Gospel-dispensation[k]. The very manner in which this act shall be performed is also specified; and it is particularly foretold, that all who are duly influenced by Gospel principles shall animate one another to the performance of it[l].]

Such then are the vows which we have made: they are comprehensive indeed, but highly reasonable, and relating only to things which are in themselves necessary; and the making of which is as much a duty under the Gospel dispensation, as ever it was under the Law.

We now proceed to notice,

II. The importance of performing them—

But how shall this be painted in any adequate terms? In it is bound up,

1. Our comfort in life—

[Many foolishly imagine, that a life devoted unto God must be one continued scene of melancholy. But is not the very reverse declared in Scripture? "The work of righteousness is peace," says the Prophet; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever." Yes, "Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come:" and we will venture to appeal to the consciences of all, whether even the greatest despisers of religion do not think that truly pious people are happier than they? In the very nature of things it must be, that they who are delivered from the tyranny of their lusts are happier than those who are yet bond-slaves of sin and Satan: their minds must be more tranquil, and their consciences more serene. But if we take into the account, that God "will manifest himself to his faithful servants as he does not unto the world," and "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and "fill them with a peace that passeth understanding, and joy that is unspeakable," we can have no doubt but that religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness," and that *in* keeping God's commandments there is great reward." In proof of this, we need only see with what delight David contemplated the paying of his vows to God[m]: and the more we resemble him in the ardour of his piety, the more shall we resemble him also in the sublimity of his joys.]

2. Our hope in death—

[What must be the prospects of an ungodly man in his dying

[k] Isai. xix. 21. [l] Jer. l. 4, 5. [m] Ps. xxii. 25. & lxvi. 13, 14.

dying hour? When he looks back upon all his duties neglected, all his vows broken, and his eternal interests sacrificed to the things of time and sense, what must he think of the state to which he is hastening? He may try to comfort himself with his own vain delusions; but he will feel a secret consciousness that he is building on the sand. Hence it is, that those who will not give themselves up to God, are so averse to hear of death and judgment: they know that, if the Scriptures be true, and God be such a God as he is there represented, they have nothing to expect but wrath and fiery indignation. It is the godly only who can feel composed and happy in the near approach of death: they, when the time of their departure is at hand, can look forward with joy to "that crown of glory which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give them." "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."]

3. Our welfare in eternity—

["God will surely put a difference between those who served him here, and those who served him not." Hear what Solomon says to us in the text: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it: for *God hath no pleasure in fools.*" No indeed; God can have no pleasure in those who never delighted themselves in him. How is it possible that he should receive to his bosom those who spent their whole lives in rebellion against him? He shews his abhorrence of them by the very name whereby he designates them in the words before us: he calls them "fools," and will leave them to reap the bitter fruits of their folly. We may see how indignant God was against Zedekiah for violating a covenant whereby he had engaged to hold the kingdom of Judah as tributary to the king of Babylon[m]. What indignation then must he feel against those who have violated all their engagements with *him!* If the neglect of vows made by compulsion to an oppressive enemy be so criminal, what must be the neglect of vows voluntarily made to the Most High God! But we need not collect this in a way of inference; for God himself has expressly told us, that we *must* pay our vows to him; that we must do it *without delay;* that if we defer to pay them, it will be imputed to us as a most heinous *sin;* and that *he will surely require* it at our hands[n]. And in the text itself he tells us, that however criminal it must be to feel such alienation of heart from God as not to vow any vow to him, "it were better for us never to vow at all, than to vow and not pay."]

ADDRESS.

[m] Ezek. xvii. 11—21. Cite the whole of this.
[n] Deut. xxiii. 21—23.

ADDRESS,

1. The young who have been just confirmed—

[Remember, I beseech you, that "the vows of God are upon you." And now hear what Almighty God says unto you: "If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth[o]." Now you, my Beloved, have "bound your souls with a bond;" you have "sworn unto the Lord, and cannot go back:" remember then that you "must not break your word;" you *must*, you "*shall* do according to *all* that has proceeded out of your mouths." O bear in mind the particular vows which you have made[p], and set yourselves diligently to the performance of them. See how determined David was, under your circumstances[q]; and make him the model of your conduct. And begin now without delay to prepare for attending on the Lord's Supper. *Your Confirmation is but a step to something beyond*, even to a dedication of yourselves to God at the table of the Lord. I mean not that you are to be hasty in taking this further step; because you ought doubtless to be well instructed in the nature of that ordinance before you partake of it; and to be fully determined through grace to live, not unto yourselves, but unto Him who died for you. But that you should keep this in view, and with all convenient speed renew at the Lord's table the vows which you have now made, the holy Psalmist informs you[r]: and his resolutions on the subject I earnestly recommend for your adoption.]

2. To the elder part of this audience—

[To you the younger will look for instruction and encouragement in the ways of God. But many who desire to have their children confirmed, would actually oppose them if they should begin to execute their vows. If a young person should begin to renounce the world, to mortify the flesh, and to live by faith on the Son of God, the generality of persons would rather be alarmed than comforted, and would exert their influence to divert his thoughts from such ways. But beware how any of you put a stumbling-block in the way of your children, either by your influence or example. Beware how, after having instigated them to vow unto the Lord, you tempt them to forget and violate their vows. Rather take occasion from the confirmation of your children to look back upon your own conduct, and to see how you have kept your own vows. Do not imagine that a lapse of years can make any difference in your obligations to serve the Lord, or that, because

[o] Numb. xxx. 2. [p] See the Catechism. [q] Ps. cxix. 106.
[r] Ps. cxvi. 12—14, 16—19. Particularly notice v. 16.

because you have forgotten your vows, God has forgot them too: they are all written in the book of his remembrance; and every word which we have addressed to the young people in reference to this matter, is applicable to you; yea, to you it applies with double force, because your more advanced age qualifies you so much better to see and follow the path of duty. I call upon you then to watch over your children, and to promote, by every possible means, their progress in the divine life. Encourage them to read the Scriptures diligently, to give themselves much to meditation and prayer, and to commence in earnest that race, which must be run by all who would obtain the prize.]

CCCCLXXVI.

EARNESTNESS IN RELIGION RECOMMENDED.

Eccl. ix. 10. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.*

THE greater part of mankind imagine, that a continued round of worldliness and pleasure will consist with religion. But their opinion is contradicted by the whole tenor of Scripture, which uniformly enjoins deadness to the world and devotedness to God. There are however some who err on the other side; and who make religion to consist in penances, and pilgrimages, and mortifications, and a total abstinence from all indulgences, however innocent, not excepting even the comforts and endearments of domestic life. In direct opposition to these are the words of Solomon in all the preceding context. He contends, that neither a cheerful use of the bounties of Providence, nor a prudent participation of the elegancies of life, nor a free enjoyment of conjugal affection, will at all interfere with our "acceptance with God," provided our ardour in the pursuit of heavenly things be not diminished by them[a]. With this St. Paul also agrees: for he says, that "God hath given us all things richly to enjoy;" and, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come."

It

[a] ver. 7—10.

It is not our intention, however, to enter into this general question; but rather to confine ourselves to the direction of Solomon in the text; in which we notice,

I. His advice—

Industry in temporal concerns is doubtless an important duty; and we may certainly understand the words before us as inculcating, and enforcing this duty. But the advice must relate also to spiritual concerns, in transacting which more especially, the utmost zeal is necessary.

Every man has a work to do for his soul—

[*The unconverted* have to get a sense of their guilt and danger, to turn unto their God with the deepest penitence and contrition, and to have their souls renewed after the Divine image ——— *The penitent* have also a great work to do. They have only just set out upon their race, and have as yet all the ground before them, over which they are to run. They have to obtain the knowledge of Christ, get their souls washed in his blood; and, in conformity to his example, to serve God in newness of heart and life ——— *The converted* too, whatever attainments they may have made, have still much which their "hand findeth to do." They have many lusts to mortify, many temptations to withstand, many conflicts to sustain, many graces to exercise, many duties to perform: to their latest hour they will be required to "glorify God with their bodies and their spirits, which are his"———]

This work must be "done with all our might"—

[It must be done *speedily, without delay.*—None of us have any time to lose. Whatever be our state at present, we know not how long our lives may be continued. The young and healthy are mortal, as well as the old and diseased: and the sturdy oak may be blown down while the bending rush survives. We should therefore imitate David, who says, "I made haste, and delayed not, to keep thy commandments."

It must be done *heartily, without remissness.*—It is not sufficient to enter upon this work with indifference, and to prosecute it in a cold lifeless manner. We must "give all diligence to make our calling sure," and "to be found of Christ in peace:" we must "*strive* to enter in at the strait gate, since we may *seek*, and not be able." Even "the righteous are *scarcely* saved," and with great difficulty. If any dream of salvation as a matter easily to be accomplished, they will "perish in their own delusions."

It

It must be done *perseveringly, without weariness.*—There is no period when we are at liberty to relax our endeavours. While we are in the world, we are still on the field of battle, and surrounded with enemies that are ever ready to take advantage of us. It is not till death that we can "put off the harness:" "till then, there is no discharge in this warfare." We must "not faint, or be weary in well-doing, if ever we would reap;" but must "be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."]

To impress this salutary advice upon our minds, let us proceed to consider—

II. The argument with which it is enforced—

We all are dying creatures, and continually hastening to the grave. Whether we be going to our business, or our pleasure, or our rest, wherever we are, and whatever we are doing, we are "going to our grave." The precise distance of our grave is hid from us: some arrive at it almost as soon as they set out on their journey: multitudes, when thinking of nothing less, drop into it suddenly, and are seen no more. Those who have walked towards it for a considerable time, have stronger and stronger intimations of their approach towards it. Many are seen with one foot already in it: and all, sooner or later, make it their long home.

From hence arise two very powerful arguments for enforcing diligence in the concerns of the soul. In the grave,

1. There is "no work" to be done—

[This life is the time for work: the next life is the time for recompence. The works needful to be done are, to "repent and believe the Gospel:" but in the eternal world there is no opportunity for performing either.

We cannot repent.—A kind of repentance indeed there will be among those who have perished in their sins: they will "weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth" with anguish: they will be sorry, not that they sinned, but that they subjected themselves to misery: sin will appear formidable to them on account of its consequences, but not hateful on account of its malignity. If they were restored to another state of probation, they would in a little time resume their former courses. As now on a bed of sickness they promise to amend their lives, but, when restored to health, become as careless as ever,

so it would be with them if they returned even from hell itself: their hearts are unrenewed, and consequently their disposition to "wallow in the mire" of sin would infallibly lead them into their former habits of worldliness and sensuality. They must for ever remain the same obdurate sinners, because the Spirit of God will never descend into their hearts to renew them unto repentance.

We cannot believe in Christ.—They will, it is true, believe many things which now they disbelieve: they will believe that Christ is a Saviour, and that he is the only Saviour of sinful men: but they will never believe in him for salvation, because he will never again be offered to them as a Saviour. No tidings of redemption will ever be heard in those dreary mansions. Never will they hear such words as those, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." No promise of acceptance is given them; and therefore there can be no scope for the exercise of faith: nor, if there were an opportunity to believe, would they be able to embrace it; because "faith is the gift of God;" and they who reject his offers of it in this world, will never have it offered them in the world to come.

This argument cannot but have the greatest weight with every considerate mind; and the rather, because it is urged by our Lord himself; "Work while it is day; for the night cometh wherein no man can work[b]."]

2. There is no remedy to be "devised"—

[While we are in this world, our "knowledge and wisdom" may be applied with effect. There is a "device" for the restoration of God's banished people[c]; and, if we be wise enough to adopt it, we cannot fail of obtaining mercy at the last day. But, if we neglect to use the remedy which is now afforded us, no other will remain for us; nothing can ever be devised whereby we may *alter*, or *avoid*, or *mitigate*, or *shorten* our doom.

We cannot *alter* it.—When once the Judge has said, "Go, thou cursed," we can never prevail on him to reverse the sentence, and say, "Come, ye blessed." *Now*, though "we are under condemnation, and the wrath of God abideth on us[d]," yet we may obtain reconciliation through the blood of Jesus, and be made heirs of a heavenly inheritance. But no such change can be effected in the eternal world: "as the tree falleth, so it will lie for ever."

We cannot *avoid* it.—We may "call upon the rocks to fall upon us, and the mountains to cover us from the wrath of the Lamb," but they cannot perform the friendly office. "If we should go up to heaven, or make our bed in hell, or take the wings

[b] John ix. 4. [c] Compare 2 Sam. xiv. 14. with Job xxxiii. 24.
[d] John iii. 18, 36.

wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, there would God seize us, and thence would he bring us" by his irresistible power, in order that we might suffer the just reward of our deeds.

We cannot *mitigate* it.—*Here* men may flee to business or pleasure: they may drown care in intoxication; and obtain some relief from it in sleep: they may shake it off in a measure by infidelity. But in the eternal world they will find no jovial companions to associate with, nothing to divert their thoughts, nothing to alleviate their pains: "wrath will have come upon them to the uttermost," and their misery will be complete.

We cannot *shorten* it.—Men in this world have one method (as they think) of terminating their miseries, namely, by suicide. A poor and fatal "device" indeed! yet such as it is, they resort to it for relief. But in the future world even this refuge will fail them: "they shall seek death, but shall not find it; and shall desire to die, but death shall flee from them[*]." Eternity will be the duration of their woe: "the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever."

How forcible then is this argument! If any "device" remained for them, and their "knowledge and wisdom" could be effectual for their relief, then they might be the more indifferent about the improvement of their day of grace. But since "this is the only accepted time, the only day of salvation," surely they should "work out their salvation instantly with fear and trembling," and seek "the things belonging to their peace, before they be for ever hid from their eyes."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are postponing their work—

[Like those who neglected the rebuilding of the Temple, we are apt to say, "The time for this work is not yet come." Youth look forward to adult age; and they who are grown to manhood think that a more advanced period of life will be more favourable for the exercises of religion: and even the aged put off the work from day to day, hoping for some "more convenient season." But how many thousands perish by deferring that work which they acknowledge to be necessary! Sickness and death find them in an unconverted state, and hurry them unprepared into the presence of God. O that all of us, whether old or young, would guard against these fatal consequences, and turn to God "this day, while it is called To-day."]

2. Those who are trifling with their work—

[There are many who would be offended, if they were thought regardless of religion, who yet by their listlessness and formality

[*] Rev. ix. 6.

formality shew that they have no real delight in it. They are exact in their attendance on ordinances; but they engage in them with a lukewarm Laodicean spirit: they have "the form of godliness, but not the power." But what can such persons think of the representations which the Scripture gives us of the Christian life? It is there described as a race, a wrestling, a combat; all of which imply the strongest possible exertions. Would to God that this matter were duly considered; and that we called upon "our souls, and all that is within us," to prosecute this great concern. To every thing that might divert our attention from it, we should answer with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and cannot come down[f]." It is in this way only that we shall ever be enabled to adopt the words of our dying Lord, "Father, I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."]

3. Those who are heartily engaged in their work—

[While the greater part of mankind make their wordly duties an excuse for neglecting religion, there are some who run into a contrary extreme, and make their religious duties an excuse for neglecting their worldly concerns. But this will bring great dishonour on religion. We are placed in the world as social beings, and have civil and social, as well as religious, duties to perform. These must be made to harmonize: and all must be attended to in their order. We must "not be slothful in business, though we must be fervent in spirit; for in both we may serve the Lord." Indeed our relative duties are, in fact, religious; because they are enjoined by God, and may be performed as unto God: nor are they less acceptable unto him in their place than the more spiritual services of prayer and praise. While therefore we would exhort all to an immediate, earnest, diligent, patient, unremitted attention to the concerns of their souls, and encourage them to disregard all the persecutions which they may endure for righteousness' sake, we would intreat them also to "walk wisely in a perfect way;" and to shew by their conduct that religion is as conducive to the interests of society as it is to the welfare of the soul.]

[f] Neh. vi. 3, 4.

CCCCLXXVII.

WISDOM NOTIONALLY APPROVED, BUT PRACTICALLY DISREGARDED.

Eccl. ix. 14—16. *There was a little city, and few men within it: and there came a great king against it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man; and he by his wisdom delivered the city: yet no man remembered*

remembered the same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

WHETHER the account here given us was an actual occurrence, or only a parabolic representation, we will not undertake to determine: but certainly the event described may easily be supposed to have taken place, and to have come to the knowledge of Solomon. In fact, a precisely similar event had taken place within the memory of Solomon; the only difference being, that the city was saved by "a wise woman," instead of "a poor wise man." After the rebellion of Absalom had been suppressed, a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, caused the defection of all the tribes of Israel. David therefore sent an army to pursue Sheba, and to besiege any city in which he should have taken refuge. Joab finding that Sheba was shut up in a city called Abel, went and "battered the wall of the city, to throw it down." Then "a wise woman" called to Joab, and remonstrated with him on the subject of the assault which he was making; and undertook, that, if he would suspend his assault, the object of his indignation should be sacrificed, and his head be cast over the wall. She then "went to all the people, *in her wisdom*," and prevailed on them to execute her project; and thus effected by her wisdom the deliverance of the city, and the preservation of all its inhabitants[a]. The minute resemblance which there is between this history and the event mentioned in the text, renders it highly probable, that the passage before us is a parable, founded upon the very fact which is here recorded.

But, whether it be a fact, or a parable, with what view is it mentioned? Some think that it is intended to represent the work of redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ, and the sad neglect with which he is treated, notwithstanding the benefits he has conferred. According to these persons, the interpretation is this. The little city, with a small garrison, is the Church, which

[a] 2 Sam. xx. 1, 2, 6, 15—22.

which confessedly consists of but "a little flock." The great king who comes against it, and besieges it, is Satan, with all his hosts, even all the principalities and powers of hell. The poor wise man is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the counsels of eternal Wisdom, has devised a way for the deliverance of his people; yet after the deliverance he has wrought out for them, is by the generality most grievously neglected.

Now though there are parts of this which do not exactly accord with such an interpretation, yet we should not have altogether disapproved of the interpretation, provided Solomon himself had not given us any clue whereby to discover his real meaning: for it is not necessary that a parable should be applicable in all its parts: it is sufficient if in its main scope it be fitted to illustrate the point which it is intended to shadow forth. But we are precluded from affixing to this passage the sense which we have now suggested, because Solomon's own reflection upon the supposed event determines beyond all controversy its precise import. Solomon intended to commend wisdom, as he frequently does in other parts of this book: in one place he exalts wisdom above folly[b]; in another, above wealth[c]; in another, above soldiers[d], and weapons of war[e]. Thus in our text he exalts it above strength; "Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength." Hence the subject for our consideration is two-fold;

I. The excellency of wisdom—

Wisdom is practical understanding, or knowledge regulated by sound judgment. Now this is greatly superior to physical force, in every point of view:

1. In relation to temporal concerns—

[The particular instance here adduced, the deliverance of a city by some extraordinary devices, will lead us to notice the operations of wisdom in the different departments of civilized life.

In war and polities it prevails far beyond mere bodily strength, however great. It is from superior skill in arms that we,

[b] Ch. ii. 13. [c] Ch. vii. 12. [d] ib. ver. 19.
[e] ver. 18.

we, who are so few in number, have been enabled to conquer an immense extent of territory, and by a very small army to keep in subjection sixty millions of people, who have scarcely one feeling, or one sentiment, in common with ourselves. And it is from the wisdom of our Constitution and of our Governors, that we, under God, have rode out the storm which overwhelmed the rest of Europe, and have been enabled to rescue from their bondage the prostrate nations all around us. Had there been less wisdom at our helm, we, and all the nations of Europe, should probably at this moment have been sunk in the lowest state of degradation and misery.

In arts and manufactures the excellency of wisdom also most eminently appears. See the machinery that is used in every branch of trade! a few children are enabled to effect in a month what thousands of grown people could not by mere manual labour accomplish in a year.

Nor is the excellency of wisdom less visible *in science and philosophy*. Who can calculate the benefits that have arisen from the study of astronomy, and the invention of the compass? How light is all human strength when placed in the balance against these products of intellectual research!

In truth, it is wisdom which most elevates us above the beasts; and draws as broad a line of distinction between man and man, as light and darkness do in the material world.]

2. In relation to spiritual affairs—

[Here wisdom is all. See what mere human efforts can effect in heathen lands: what penances, what pilgrimages, what sufferings of different kinds, will men have recourse to, in order to obtain peace in their own souls! yet can they never obtain it. They may weary themselves even unto death, yet can they never secure to themselves any spiritual benefit whatever.

But let a man attend to the councils of wisdom given him by our blessed Lord, and all that he can desire is attained at once. Peace will flow into his soul, as soon as ever his conscience is sprinkled with the blood of Christ. His powers are invigorated with preter-natural strength, the moment he by faith apprehends the Lord Jesus: from being so weak as not to be able to do *any* thing, he becomes instantly so strong as to be "able to do *all* things[f]." A new set of energies are developed, and such as Satan is not able to withstand. That enemy, who with assured confidence of success besieged the soul, is constrained, like Sennacherib, to flee with precipitation and disgrace[g]. In a word, the simple device of a "life of faith upon the Son of God" effects every thing, liberating the soul from all its bondage, and making it victorious over all its enemies.]

But

[f] John xv. 2. Phil. iv. 13. [g] Jam. iv. 7.

But from daily observation, we are constrained to lament,

II. The disregard shewn it, notwithstanding its acknowledged worth. By how few are its dictates attended to as they ought to be! Alas! they are neglected and despised, by the great mass of mankind:

1. By the gay and thoughtless—

[They have no ear for the counsels of Wisdom. They will commend her in general terms; but will have as little as possible to do with her instructions. Let the parent labour ever so much to instil wisdom into the minds of his children, he will find, to his grief, that the enchantments of folly baffle all his efforts. It should seem no difficult task to prevail on them to think before they act, and to regulate their conduct by sound principles: but though he give "line upon line, and precept upon precept," he will have reason to bless himself, if, after all his endeavours, his family do not embitter his days by their faults and follies. The word of God too may be acknowledged by them as good: but not a precept in it is suffered to have an ascendant over their mind. Sabbath after Sabbath are divine instructions poured into their ears; but none are suffered to descend into the heart. In fact, they are despised; and if obtruded upon the mind as principles of action, they are rejected with scorn and contempt.]

2. By the formal and self-righteous—

[Wisdom's sublimest dictates are by these regarded as the reveries of a heated imagination. The whole life of faith is foolishness in the eyes of a self-righteous Pharisee. He sees no suitableness in it to the end proposed. He thinks that an attendance on ordinances, and a performance of some moral duties, are quite sufficient: Why should he mourn and weep? What is there in faith that can benefit his soul? Why may not his works find acceptance with God? In vain is he told that the Gospel is "the wisdom of God in a mystery;" and that the very angels in heaven are made wiser by the revelation of it to the Church[h]. In vain is he told what the Lord Jesus Christ, that "Wonderful Counsellor," has done for the redemption of a ruined world, and will do in all who believe in him. No sense of obligation abides upon his mind: no expressions of gratitude flow from his lips: the Benefactor is forgotten, and the benefit despised: and he chooses rather to seek his resources within himself, than to depend for them on the bounty of another.]

3. The backsliding professor—

[The

[h] Eph. iii. 10.

[The man who has once "professed godliness," has given his testimony to the excellence of wisdom. But when he declines from the way of godliness, he revokes his testimony, and becomes an open advocate for folly: he proclaims to all, that the ways of wisdom are incapable of affording him any solid comfort; or, at all events, that there is more happiness to be found in the vanities of time and sense, than in the service of the living God. Yes, thou backslider, thou "exaltest folly, and praisest the wicked[i]:" and, if thou condemnest, as thou must, the inhabitants of the city that left their benefactor to pine away in poverty and contempt, much more must thou condemn thyself, who hast, by thy declensions, "crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."]

Let me now IMPROVE the subject, by recommending to your adoption,

1. A life of consideration and thoughtfulness.

[The man who has begun to think and to consider, has already got more than half way to heaven. It is inconsideration that ruins the whole world. Would men but inquire from day to day, What have I done? Has it been consonant with the dictates of sound wisdom? Have I proposed to myself the best ends? and have I pursued them by the fittest means? how much evil would they avoid, and how much misery would they escape! O that I might prevail upon you to enter on such a course as this! Admirable is that advice of Solomon, "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house[k]." This is what any prudent builder will do, though he is only constructing a temporary habitation for the body: and how much more should *we* do it, who are building for the immortal soul! Adopt this plan then: think what you have to do for God: think by what means you may best advance the interest of your souls: and redeem, as it were, every hour in preparation for eternity. "Walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."]

2. A life of real piety—

[Nothing but this will inspire true wisdom: nothing but this will enable us to counteract with effect the assaults of our great adversary. Let us seek from above "a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might:" then, whether we be poor or rich, we shall assuredly be victorious. Indeed the poor are for the most part more highly favoured than the rich. The rich are too apt to be self-confident and self-sufficient; whilst the poor accept thankfully the proffered aids of the Gospel. Hence "the things which are

[i] Prov. xxviii. 4. [k] ib. xxiv. 27.

are hid from the wise and prudent, are frequently revealed to babes;" and hence, whilst the rich are vanquished, the poor are crowned with victory. Let it not be forgotten, that "in the Lord alone we have either righteousness or strength." "Not by might or by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts:" yes, by the Spirit of the living God revealing the Saviour to us, and communicating strength out of his fulness, we shall be "enabled to withstand in the evil day," and shall have that joyful song put into our mouths, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"]

CCCCLXXVIII.

YOUTH WARNED OF THE FUTURE JUDGMENT.

Eccl. xi. 9. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

EARTHLY pleasure is doubtless gratifying to flesh and blood: hence it is more or less an object of desire to all: but there are two considerations which may well abate our ardour in the pursuit, namely, that its gratifications will soon come to an end; and that there is an approaching judgment, at which we must give an account of all that we have ever done in the body, and receive from God's mouth a sentence corresponding with the tenor of our past life. In the verses preceding our text, the former consideration is urged; and we are told, that, however protracted our pleasures may be, they are but like a winter's sun, which will soon set in darkness, and be followed by a long and dreary night. Such a night is not far off, even from those who are in the very morning of life. It may be hastened prematurely, as it were, by sickness, and cares, and unavoidable misfortunes; and it must come at last through the infirmities of age, which, if our life be prolonged, will make it but "labour and sorrow." The latter consideration is suggested in the text, which contains two things;

I. A keen remonstrance—

The

The address here made to youth, though it appears like a concession, is not really so—

[It has been thought by some to be a concession, recommending youth to enjoy themselves in the world; only to do it in such a way as not to endanger their happiness in a future life. And it is certain, that there are in this book many concessions to that effect[a]———Such passages as these may indeed be easily pressed too far: but, on the other hand, they are not in general understood by the religious world. Religious people are apt to imagine, that Christianity requires an utter abandonment of those things which the carnal mind affects; and that a pious person who possesses any considerable measure of earthly comforts, is necessarily inconsistent in his conduct. But this is a mistake, and a mistake which greatly needs to be rectified; because it occasions many unjust censures, and uncharitable reflections. "God has given us all things richly to enjoy[b]:" and, provided we do not spend an undue portion of our substance on earthly indulgences, or set our affections upon them, there is nothing in Christianity which prohibits a reasonable use, and a temperate enjoyment of them. If only we sit loose to them in our hearts, and enjoy God in them, they are perfectly lawful; yea, "they are sanctified to us by the word of God and prayer[c]."

But it is not in this sense that the address before us is to be understood:]

It is, on the contrary, a just and severe remonstrance—

[The terms here used are such as cannot well be taken in a good sense. To "walk in the ways of our own heart, and in the sight of our own eyes," is equivalent to walking in the ways of *criminal* self-indulgence. This is the import of these expressions in other passages of Scripture[d]———and so they must be taken here; as is evident from the awful judgments with which such indulgences are menaced in our text. The text is, in fact, an ironical remonstrance, similar to that which Elijah uttered, when he condemned the worshippers of Baal; "Cry aloud; for he is a God[e]:" and that by which Micaiah reproved the impolicy of Ahab; "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper[f]." By this kind of irony Solomon intended to convey an idea, that young men are *bent on* such indulgences; that they *promise themselves security* in the midst of them; and that they *will not be prevailed on by more temperate reproof:* and, in this view, his words may be thus

[a] Ch. ii. 24. & iii. 12, 13. & v. 18, 19. [b] 1 Tim. vi. 17.
[c] 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5. [d] Numb. xv. 39. Deut. xxix. 19.
[e] 1 Kin. xviii. 27. [f] 1 Kin. xxii. 15.

thus paraphrased: "You will, notwithstanding all that I can say to dissuade you from it, go on in the ways of sin, persuading yourselves that nothing but happiness awaits you: and therefore go on; and follow the bent of your own inclinations: but know, that in the end you will find yourselves grievously disappointed." Severe as such a remonstrance is, it is perfectly just: for, who that considers what the great end of our being is, can doubt the wickedness of living to the world and to the flesh? or who that sees how contrary such conduct is to that of Christ and his Apostles, can doubt what the issue of such a life shall be? Verily, "if we mind earthly things, we are enemies to the cross of Christ, and our end will be destruction[g];" for, whatever may be said or thought to the contrary, "to be carnally-minded is death[h]."]

To this is annexed,

II. A solemn warning—

There is a day of judgment fast approaching—

[God will most assuredly "judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, even by his Son, Jesus Christ." Before his tribunal we must all appear: the young, as well as the old, shall then give up their account to him; and the things which we did in the earlier part of life shall be brought forth for judgment, as well as those which were done at a more advanced age. The book of God's remembrance shall be opened; and every thing that was recorded in it, from the first moment of our existence to the latest breath we drew, shall be adduced as illustrative of our true character, and as the ground of God's final sentence.]

Then shall the things which are now done receive their proper reward—

[The judgment of God will not then be regulated by our views, but by his own unerring wisdom. We may palliate a life of vanity and worldliness now; but he will view it, as indeed it is, as a life of rebellion against him. It argues a total alienation of heart from him: it shews that we lived to please ourselves rather than him, and that we were in reality a god unto ourselves. He had told us plainly, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die:" but we would not believe it. He had told us, that "the broad road, in which the many are walking, leadeth to destruction; and that the narrow way alone leadeth unto life:" but we would not be persuaded that such an awful declaration should ever be verified. Nevertheless so it will be found in the last day: and of this we may be perfectly assured: for it stands on the word of God, which is

[g] Phil. iii. 18, 19. [h] Rom. viii. 6.

is as immutable as God himself: "Know thou, that for all these things God will call thee into judgment."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who seek their happiness in earthly things—

[Say not, You commit no gross sin, and therefore have no cause to fear. The question simply is, Do you walk after the way of your own heart? If you do, it matters little what path you choose, whether it be that of open, or secret sin: you are equally living without God in the world, and are equally obnoxious to his heavy displeasure. I mean not by this to say, that all sins are alike, or that gross immoralities will not augment your guilt and condemnation in the last day. But this is an undoubted truth, that he only who gives up himself to God in this world, can ever dwell with him in the world to come: for "if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption: and it is only from sowing to the Spirit, that we can hope to reap life everlasting." Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we would persuade you, whilst yet we may avert from you the impending storm: we would persuade thee in particular, O young man, that thou mayest not any longer deceive thy soul, and dream of happiness in another world, when thou art only "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath."]

2. Those who are seeking happiness in the ways of God—

[Say whether thou hast not found more solid joy in the ways of God, than ever thou foundest in the vanities of the world? Say whether thou hast not found it better to "mortify thy members upon earth," than to indulge them; and to live to God, rather than to live unto thyself? The joy thou now hast is legitimate: it is such as Prophets and Apostles had before thee; and such as God has freely conceded to thee, to the utmost extent of all thy wishes: "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Indeed thy present joys are the gift of God to thy soul. Go on then "rejoicing in the Lord always:" yea, rejoice, if so it may be, "with a joy that is unspeakable and glorified." These joys will never make the future judgment formidable; on the contrary, they will help to prepare thee for it, inasmuch as they are themselves an earnest of thine everlasting inheritance.]

CCCCLXXIX.

REMEMBERING GOD IN OUR YOUTH.

Eccl. xii. 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*

INSTRUCTION may profitably be given in a variety of ways: indeed, in order to be effectual, it must be accommodated in some measure to the dispositions and habits of the persons addressed. To one who is wayward and self-willed, the pungency of irony may be well applied; whilst with the tractable and docile, the more simple and direct way of affectionate exhortation may be of more avail. Both these methods are adopted by Solomon in the passage before us. In the verses immediately preceding our text, he addresses a young man whom he supposes to be bent on the prosecution of his evil ways: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will call thee into judgment." Then, after a serious admonition to avoid the evils which ungovernable passions will bring upon him, he affectionately exhorts him to devote his early life to the exercises of true piety.

It is observed by some, that the word which in our text is rendered "thy Creator," is, in the original, in the plural number, "thy Creators:" and the passage in that view is supposed to mark the concurrence of the three Persons in the ever-blessed Trinity, in the formation of man; according to what is written in the book of Genesis, "Let us make man in our image[a]." But without drawing your attention to any observations of a critical nature, I shall endeavour simply to shew you,

I. What is implied in "remembering our Creator"—

Of course, it cannot be supposed that it is a mere act of the memory which is here recommended, but

[a] Gen. i. 26.

but such a remembrance as befits the relation in which we stand to him as his creatures. We should remember then,

1. His authority over us—

[As the work of his hands, we have received from him all our powers, whether of mind or body. It is of his bounty alone that we have been endowed with the faculty of reason, which elevates us above all the rest of this lower world, and brings us into a near conformity with that higher order of created intelligences, the holy angels. But for what purpose has he thus distinguished us, but that we might render him services worthy both of our present state, and our future destinies? "He has formed us for himself, that we might shew forth his praise." This is the end for which we are to live: nor is any thing on earth to divert us from the course which HE has marked out for us. Obedience, it is true, is due to our parents, and to all others whom the providence of God has placed over us: but the authority of the creature must always be regarded as subordinate to that of our Creator: and, if at any time the will of man stand opposed to the will of God, we must then reply, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." Whatever solicitations we may have from without or from within to violate any part of God's revealed will, we must withstand them manfully, and resist them even unto death. Knowing that "we are not our own, but God's, we must glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his."]

2. The commands he has given us—

[We will not here enter into the different commandments of the law, but draw your attention rather to that great commandment of the Gospel, to believe in Christ: "This is his commandment, says St. John, that ye believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ[b]." This command should be had in constant remembrance. It is addressed to every child of man. There is no one so innocent, as not to need a Saviour; nor any one so guilty, but that he may, through penitence and faith, obtain an interest in that Saviour, whom God has provided for a ruined world. Do not imagine, my young friends, that you are not concerned in this, or that it will be time enough for you to attend to it, when you shall feel a greater need of mercy. You all are sinners: you all have a consciousness within yourselves that you have done many things which you ought not, and left undone many things which you ought to have done: you therefore have in your own bosoms a witness that you need a Saviour: and as in the presence of the Most High God, I declare unto you, that there is no mercy for

[b] 1 John iii. 23.

for the young, any more than for the old, but in the name, and through the mediation, of Jesus Christ: "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." Go then to this Saviour, and implore mercy at his hands. Look to him as dying for your sins, and "as reconciling you to God by the blood of his cross." Let every one of you from day to day wash in the fountain of his blood, and clothe yourselves with the robe of his unspotted righteousness, and live altogether upon "his fulness, receiving out of it" continual supplies of all needful grace.]

3. His continual presence with us—

"God is in every place, beholding the evil and the good:" and wherever you are, you should see, as it were, this inscription written, "Thou God seest me[c]." This is a point which you should never forget for one single moment: for it is only by bearing this in mind that you will be kept from the indulgence of secret sins. When no human eye is upon us, we are apt to think that we may give a greater latitude to our conduct: but we should remember that the darkness is no darkness with God, but the night and the day to him are both alike: "there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." Oh, if you bear this in remembrance, you will never do what you know to be wrong, nor utter what you know to be false: you will act in all things as in the immediate presence of your God, and will do nothing but what you believe to be good and acceptable in his sight.]

4. His determination to judge us in the last day—

[God "has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained, even by his Son Jesus Christ." In that day all shall be summoned to his judgment-seat, the old and the young, the rich and the poor: not one that has ever been born into the world shall then be absent: the child that died in the birth, as well as the man of an hundred years old, shall be summoned to receive his everlasting doom, according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. To those who die before they have attained the knowledge of good and evil, we doubt not but that the mercy of God will be extended: but to those who have lived to your age, judgment or mercy will be dispensed according as you have remembered or forgotten God. Most awful is that declaration of the Psalmist, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that *forget* God[d]." If you have forgotten his authority over

[c] Gen. xvi. 13. [d] Ps. ix. 17.

over you, and especially his command to believe in his Son Jesus Christ; if you have forgotten that his eye was always upon you, inspecting your most secret thoughts, and noting them down in order to his future judgment; and if you have lived without any concern about the sentence that shall then be passed upon you; it will indeed be an awful day to you, a commencement of such misery as no words can describe, no imagination can conceive. Remember then that God marks down in the book of his remembrance your every act, and every word, and every thought; and that it is your wisdom so to live, that, whether called at an earlier or later period of life, you may give up your account to him with joy, and not with grief.]

Such is the duty of all without exception: but the text requires me more particularly to shew,

II. Why we should thus remember him in early life—

It were easy to accumulate reasons on so plain a point: but we shall content ourselves with assigning a few of the most obvious;

1. This is the most favourable time—

[It is of the nature of sin to harden the heart and to sear the conscience: and therefore the less we have been habituated to sin, the more hope there is that a good impression may be made upon our minds. We cannot agree with those who represent the hearts of youth as a sheet of white paper, on which you may write either good or evil: for, alas! there is evil, not merely written, but inscribed there in a most abundant measure, and in characters that are almost indelible: but we cordially accede to this truth, that the young are as yet only like plants sprouting from the earth, pliable and easy to be trained; whilst at a more advanced age they become like trees, which retain their form, unyielding, and unmoved. From the very employments too of men in more advanced life, there arise many disadvantages: being drawn to a more vigorous pursuit of earthly things, they are, not unfrequently, so oppressed with "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, that the good seed which has been sown in them cannot grow up, unto perfection." But from these things young people are comparatively free. Besides, at this season they have an express promise from God, which they cannot plead in future life*: and therefore in a variety of views they may well consider this as "the most convenient season" for piety that can ever occur.]

2. It

* Prov. viii. 17.

2. It may, for aught we know, be the only time that shall be allotted us—

[The youngest and the healthiest amongst us may be speedily removed. Let any one survey the monuments that surround him, and he will see that multitudes have been cut off at his age, though once they appeared as likely to live as any who have survived them. And what if disease or accident arrest you before you have truly devoted yourselves to God? Will you have any opportunity to repair your error in the grave? "Is there any work or device there," by which you can accomplish what here was left undone? No: "as the tree falleth, so it lieth:" and as you die, in a converted or unconverted state, so you must remain for ever. "To-day then, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts," as the generality, alas! are but too prone to do.]

3. No other thing in the universe can so contribute to our present happiness—

[It is quite a mistake to imagine that happiness can be found in the vanities of time and sense. From infallible authority we can declare that every thing under the sun is mere "vanity and vexation of spirit." But in the service of God there is real joy: his ways are all, without exception, "ways of pleasantness and peace:" and "in keeping his commandments there is great reward." Ask any one whether he ever regretted that he had given himself up to God too soon? We have heard of men, even of good men, as Job and Jeremiah, cursing the day of their *birth:* but who ever cursed the day of his *new birth?* At every period of life this is a subject that will bear reflection and impart delight: and in proportion as we grow in piety will our joy in God be increased.]

4. There will certainly come a time when we shall wish we had sought the Lord in early life—

[The text speaks of "evil days as coming;" and sooner or later they are coming to all. There is *a time of sickness* or old age coming, "wherein we shall have no pleasure" in earthly things: and shall we not then wish, that we had sought the Lord in our youth? Shall we then look back with pleasure on the sins that we have committed, or on the vanities that have kept us from God? Nothing but the consolations of God will then be of any avail to make us happy amidst the evils, which, from pain or debility, we shall have to sustain. But there is *a time of death* also which we must meet: and what will be our thoughts at that period? Then it will be of little moment to us what joys or sorrows we have met with in our former life. All our anxiety will be about the future. Oh! with

with what force will that question press upon the mind, "Am I ready? Am I prepared to meet my God?" How different will our feelings then be, according as we have given up ourselves to God in our early youth, or put off the work of our souls to a dying hour! and what an unfit season will that be to *begin* that work! Go one step farther: follow the soul into the eternal world: view it standing *at the judgment-seat of Christ:* What will be its feelings at *that day?* I need not say: your own consciences will tell you. At this moment, even though you choose not to live *the life* of the righteous, you are saying inwardly in your hearts, "Let me die *the death* of the righteous, and let my *last end* be like his." Then, as these times must come, let us work while it is day, knowing assuredly, that the night is coming when no man can work, and when we shall bitterly lament, that ever we lost this day of our visitation, and neglected the things belonging to our everlasting peace.]

ADDRESS,

1. The younger part of our audience—

[You are now going to take upon you the vows that were made in your behalf in baptism. "*Now*" therefore more particularly "remember God." Remember, that he sees the way in which you perform this duty: he sees whether you endeavour truly to approve yourselves to him, or whether you only mock him by a thoughtless compliance with an established form. Go to him, and surrender up yourselves wholly to him, as "the first-fruits of his creatures," and you will have reason to bless God to all eternity that ever you were called to perform this solemn service. But, if you go without any sincere desire to devote yourselves to him, you will only harden your own hearts, and increase the guilt you have already contracted. "Let me however hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." Yes, dearly Beloved, we will hope, respecting some of you at least, that we "have not bestowed upon you labour in vain."]

2. To those who have grown to man's estate—

[Every argument used with the young, presses with additional weight on you, and says, with greatly augmented force, "Remember NOW thy Creator." If in your earlier days you were led to comply with this advice, I will venture to ask, Do you repent of having done so? Is not the chief matter of your regret, that you did not give yourselves up to him at a yet earlier period, and that you have not adhered more stedfastly to the engagements you entered into? If you have, on the contrary, advanced in the Divine life, and grown from babes to young men, or from young men to fathers, does not

not that afford you matter of very exalted joy? Go on then, "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is before:" and know that, "when the days arrive in which you shall say, you have no pleasure in *them*," you shall experience "a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not;" which this world can neither give nor take away; and which shall be to you a pledge and earnest of everlasting felicity in the bosom of your God.]

CCCCLXXX.

THE SUM OF ALL TRUE RELIGION.

Eccl. xii. 13, 14. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

IN this Book are many things difficult to be understood, and capable of being perverted by any one who desires to justify himself in an undue attachment to the world. But a reference to the condition of the author will enable us to explain the whole in a satisfactory and consistent manner. Solomon was possessed of all that this world could afford; and he rendered every object, and every employment, subservient to his own comfort. In all this he sinned not. It was not in the *use* of God's creatures that he sinned, but in the *abuse* of them. And we also may both possess and enjoy all that God in his providence has allotted to us, if only we enjoy God in the creature, and have earth subordinated to heaven. What the real drift of all his observations was, is told us in the words which we have just read, and which give us a clue to all that he has before spoken. In them we see,

I. The sum of all moral and religious instructions—

Many things we have to say both on the subject of morals and of religion; but they are all comprehended in this one saying, "Fear God, and keep his commandments."

In

In this is contained the whole substance of religion—

[By the fear of God we understand, not a slavish dread of him, but a holy filial regard, arising from a sense of his relation to us as a reconciled God and Father. And in "keeping his commandments" we include a due attention to that great commandment of the Gospel, the believing in our Lord Jesus Christ for salvation[a]. We must distinguish carefully between a legal and an evangelical interpretation of these terms, lest we confound the Gospel with the Law: we must guard especially against a reliance on our obedience, as if it could in any way, or in any degree, purchase salvation for us. But, if we be duly jealous on these points, we need never be afraid of asserting, that all true religion is comprehended in the duties inculcated in our text. Every thing else is subservient to these things: the most important principles are of little use, except as they conduce to this end. It was for this that the Lord Jesus Christ undertook and executed the whole work of Redemption: "To this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living[b]," and "purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works[c]." All the promises of the Gospel are given to us for this end, to "make us partakers of the Divine nature[d]," that we may, under their gracious influence, "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God[e]." In a word, it is this which is the scope and end of all our ministrations; we are sent "to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God[f]."]

In this all is contained that deserves the attention of a rational Being—

[It is of very small consequence whether we have more or less of this world: its pleasures, riches, honours, are but for a moment. What enjoyment has the rich man now of all his sumptuous fare? or what sense has Lazarus of all his former wants? All is passed away; and nothing remains of all the good or evil that befell them in this world, but a responsibility for the use they made of it. The period allotted for the enjoyment of earthly things is but a day, an hour, a moment. What does it signify to a man acting a play, whether he performs the part of a king or a beggar? Whatever his real character be, that he assumes, and that he retains, as soon as the last scene has ended. So the only thing that is of importance to us is, What is that character which we shall sustain to all eternity? Have we been rebellious and disobedient?

[a] 1 John iii. 23. [b] Rom. xiv. 9. [c] Tit. ii. 14.
[d] 2 Pet. i. 4. [e] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [f] Acts xxvi. 18.

dient? or have we feared God and wrought righteousness? Those are the points that will determine our future destinies; and therefore they are the only points deserving of any serious regard.]

But this leads us more particularly to notice,

II. The consideration that gives to it all its weight and importance—

This will be the one point of inquiry at the last day—

[God will come to judge the world: and, when examining the state of every individual, he will not ask, What sect we were of; or, What our sentiments and professions were; but, What our practice was, and What the habit of our minds towards him? I may even say, that that which passes under the name of Christian *experience*, will be of no account, as distinct from the duties inculcated in our text. It is radical and universal holiness alone, that God values: and, if that be right in its principle and end, it is the only thing which will be regarded in God's estimate of our character. In a word, it is "the whole of man;" it is his whole *duty*, and his whole *happiness*: his whole *duty*, as comprehending universal holiness; and his whole *happiness*, as being really a foretaste of heaven itself.]

According to this will our eternal state be fixed—

[Some of this will appear in our external conduct, but some will be found only in the internal habit of the mind; because there is very rarely scope for discovering in outward act all that the grace of God will form in the heart. "Every secret thing" therefore, every secret desire, purpose, inclination, appetite, affection, will go to the forming of God's estimate, and the determining the measure of our future recompence. If these have been evil, the best acts will have lost their value: but if these have been good, the smallest acts that can possibly have been performed, the widow's mite, or a cup of cold water given to a disciple, will be ranked amongst the most acceptable services, and be acknowledged as such by God himself. If we have really had "the fear of God in our hearts," and "walked in his fear all the day long," and, under the influence of that principle, laboured to approve ourselves to him in all things, we shall assuredly hear him say to us in that day, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."]

This subject will be of the greatest use,

1. To correct the errors of those who affect superior light—

[Many

[Many there are who leave out all practical godliness from their system. They can think of nothing but God's eternal decrees, and of the finished work of Christ *for* us; forgetting that there still remains a work for him to accomplish *in* us. They would account all such views as have been presented to you, *legal*, and unfit to be offered to a Christian auditory. What Solomon accounted "the conclusion of the whole matter," and "the whole of man," they account as nothing. But so did not Peter, who says, that "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him[g]." Nor was Paul of their opinion; for he has declared, (and in the very Epistle where he most enlarges on the decrees of God,) that it is "by patient continuance in well-doing we must attain to glory and honour and immortality[h]." And we do not hesitate to say, that if an angel from heaven were to be sent to preach the Gospel, the statements before given would constitute a very principal part of his ministrations. St. John in his visions saw an angel flying through the whole world, to carry the everlasting Gospel to people of all nations and tongues; and the words in which he addressed the whole human race were like those of our text, "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come[i]." Here is the very exhortation of Solomon, enforced with the identical consideration which he urges; and it is expressly called, "The everlasting Gospel." Let those who affect a higher and superior tone be convinced of their mistake. Let them bring forward all the sublimest truths of Christianity in their place; but let "this be the conclusion of the whole matter;" for, whether they will believe it or not, this is "the one thing needful," and "the whole of man."]

2. To dispel the fears of those whose knowledge is yet dim—

[As there are many who delight in nothing but the deepest mysteries of our religion, so there are many who make those mysteries an occasion of continual disquietude. The doctrines of predestination and election are ever present with their minds, as grounds of terror and despondency: they cannot see that they are of the number of God's elect; and therefore they imagine that all exertions on their part are in vain. But the fears of this people are such as ought no longer to be indulged: for there is no man in the universe that is authorized to consider himself as one of God's elect, any farther than he has "the spot of God's children" upon him. It is by his fear of God, and his obedience to God's commandments, that he must judge of his state before God: and

[g] Acts x. 35. [h] Rom. ii. 7. with 2 Cor. v. 10, 11.
[i] Rev. xiv. 6, 7.

and to judge of his election by any other standard, is only to deceive his own soul. If then those who distress themselves about the doctrines of election would dismiss those subjects from their minds, and contemplate only what is more within the sphere of their comprehension, they would do well. Let me recommend this plan to all. Look not at God's decrees, which you can never explore, but at the visible effects of his grace upon your souls: and, if you can find "the works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope" evidenced in your conduct, you may from thence assuredly infer "your election of God[k];" since those are indisputably the fruits of his grace; and his grace has been communicated according to his purpose, which "he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began[l]."]

3. To regulate the conduct of those whose views are Scriptural and just—

["The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom[m]:" and to get this in a more uniform and abiding exercise, is to be the one object of our lives. It is the beginning, and "the conclusion, of the whole matter." O that this were better understood amongst us! An old writer observes, that Religion consists not in *No*tions, but *Mo*tions: and the observation, though quaint, is true. The difference is not always visible at first sight; and the one is often mistaken for the other; but, if separated, they are as wide asunder as heaven and hell. Let it never be forgotten, that holiness of heart and life is that which constitutes our meetness for heaven; and that it is only by growth in that, that we can ever honour God on earth, or secure the enjoyment of him in a better world.]

[k] 1 Thess. i. 3, 4. [l] 2 Tim. i. 9. Jer. xxxi. 3. [m] Ps. cxi. 10.

CCCCLXXXI.

THE CHURCH'S LOVE TO CHRIST.

Cant. i. 3, 4. *Thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee. Draw me: we will run after thee.*

THIS Divine Song was admitted into the Sacred Canon soon after the Babylonish captivity, (most probably by Ezra,) and has been admitted both by Jews and Christians from that time as constituting an important part of the Inspired Volume. It is called the Song of Songs, because of its peculiar excellence, there being no other to be compared with it

it, as delineating and describing the love which subsists between Christ and his Church. There are indeed similar images used in other parts of Holy Writ, and particularly in the 45th Psalm; but there is a richness and variety in this, by which it is pre-eminently distinguished. True it is, that the representations contained in it render it unfit for the carnal eye, which would be more likely to be injured by it, through the influence of a polluted imagination, than to derive from it the good which to a spiritually enlightened mind it is calculated to convey. Many of the expressions, which, at the time they were written, were clear and intelligible, are, for want of a more intimate knowledge of the various circumstances which would elucidate them, inexplicable to us: but the general purport of the whole is evident enough: it is a kind of allegory written in the form of a pastoral poem, in which different persons are introduced, and bear a part, relieving, as it were, occasionally, the dialogue betwixt Christ and his Church; the one under the character of a Bridegroom; and the other, of a Bride, espoused to him in this world, and waiting for the consummation of her nuptials in the world to come.

The abruptness with which the poem opens is very remarkable. The Spouse, having her mind full of her beloved, breaks forth without any mention of his name, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." She is ready to think that the minds of all must of necessity be occupied with *his* excellencies, and must therefore of necessity know to whom she refers. She then commends "his love, as better," and more exhilarating, "than wine, because of the savour of his good ointments[a];" and assigns this as *the reason of her love towards him*, and *her ardent desire after him.*

These are the two points for our consideration at this time:

I. The reason of the Church's love to Christ—

"His name is as ointment poured forth"—

[A rich

[a] That seems the more proper place for the stop.

A rich ointment poured forth will fill a whole house with its odour[b], so that all who are within it shall be refreshed with its fragrance: and such is the delight which the whole Church derives from the mention of the name of her Beloved.

Consider his name, "Emmanuel:" it was a name given him eight hundred years before he came into the world: and the interpretation of that name is given us by the sacred historian, that we may know all the riches of grace and love contained in it. Its import is, "God with us[c]." Wonderful name! God, "the mighty God," with us, worms of the earth; with us, who have been all our days rebels against his Divine Majesty, and who might well have expected to have been made everlasting monuments of his righteous indignation. In some respect indeed he might bear that name, even in the regions of darkness and misery; since he is there by his power inflicting his heavy judgments on all who inhabit those dreary mansions: but he is with *us* by his love; yea, he is with *us* in our very nature; "bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh;" God and man in one person! Stupendous mystery! Can it be so? Is it true, that the God of heaven and earth has so condescended to assume our nature, and to sojourn upon earth, that he might commend himself to us as our Beloved? Say, ye who have any spiritual senses, does not a fragrance go forth at this name Emmanuel, sufficient to fill the whole universe with its odours?

But take another name, the name of "Jesus." This was given him by the Angel, when he was conceived in the womb; and the giving it was considered as a completion of the prophecy that assigned to him the name Emmanuel[d]. And a fulfilment of the prophecy it was; for "Jesus" is *Jah Hosea*, or *Divine Saviour*. Here, in addition to his Godhead, as united to the manhood, we have the end of his incarnation plainly announced: it was, to *save* a ruined world: yes, "he came, not to *condemn* the world, but that through him," even through his meritorious blood and righteousness, "the world might be *saved*." Think of this, ye who have destroyed your own souls, and are trembling for fear of the Divine judgments: your God has become a man, on purpose that he might fulfil the law which you have broken, and endure the curse which you have merited; and by this substitution of himself in your place, might deliver you from death and hell, and make you partakers of his own eternal kingdom and glory. Does not this name refresh and animate your souls? Can you hear it without receiving from it sensations which it is not in the power of language to express?

Consider yet one other name, that name whereby we are particularly instructed to call him, "The Lord our Right-

[b] John xii. 3. [c] Matt. i. 23. [d] ib. ver. 21—23.

Righteousness[c]." Here you have the same blessed intimations as in the former names, respecting his Godhead, and the gracious ends of his incarnation; with this additional suggestion, that his righteousness was wrought out for you, yea, that he himself is your Righteousness. A creature's righteousness would not have sufficed for you: you needed the righteousness of God himself: and God himself has become a man, that in your nature he might work out a righteousness, that should be imputed to you and put upon you, and constitute your justifying righteousness at the bar of judgment. Tell me, Brethren, can you hear this unmoved? What spiritual perception can you have, if you are not even ravished with delight at the sound of such a name as this? Surely it is the out-pouring of this ointment that makes heaven to be the place it is: yea, to be within the reach of this atmosphere, is heaven.

We forbear to mention any other of his glorious names, lest we distract your attention by the variety[d]: sufficient have been mentioned to justify the Church's attachment to this adorable Saviour.]

On account of the fragrance diffused by his name, "the virgins love him"—

[By "the virgins" we understand, all that are "pure in heart," and have "been betrothed to him in righteousness and truth[e]." Of all such the Apostle says, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ[f]." These all love the Lord Jesus Christ. In the eyes of others, this adorable Being has "no beauty or comeliness for which to be desired[g]:" but in the eyes of the Church "he is truly precious[gg]," "fairer than ten thousand," and "altogether lovely:" and the one desire of her heart is, to be able to say, "This is my Friend and my Beloved[h]." In comparison of him, all other suitors are utterly despised. The whole universe presents no other object to her view that deserves a thought: the constant state of her soul towards him is, "How great is thy goodness! how great is thy beauty[i]! Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee[j]." Sweet as created excellencies once appeared to her, she has now no eye to see them, no taste to enjoy them. She is altogether occupied with the savour of her Beloved's name, the perfume of which makes every other odour worthless at least, if not nauseous and offensive. In a word, so entirely does this beloved object fill her soul, that with him a dungeon would be heaven; and without him, heaven itself would be a dungeon or a desert.]

From

[c] Jer. xxiii. 6. [d] See Isai. ix. 6. [e] Hos. ii. 19. 20.
[f] 2 Cor. xi. 2. [g] Isai. liii. 2. [gg] 1 Pet. ii. 7.
[h] Cant. v. 10, 16. [i] Zech. ix. 17. [j] Ps. lxxiii. 25.

From hence naturally follows,

II. Her ardent desire after him—

Conscious that his gifts are his own, and that without his gracious assistance she can do nothing, she presents before him,

1. Her supplication—

[Our blessed Lord himself has said, "No man can come unto me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him[k]." And this total insufficiency for every thing that is good, the Church confesses in this short, but ardent, petition, "Draw me!" None but Jesus himself can open for us the box in which this ointment is contained, or give the spiritual perception whereby alone its fragrance can be discovered. How many, in the days of his flesh, were rather incensed against him, than drawn to him, by all the wonders of his love! and how many at this day are like the idols which they worship! "they have eyes, and see not; ears, and hear not; noses, and smell not[l]." But these have had spiritual senses given unto them; and therefore they pant after communion with their blessed Lord.

Observe, it is not the carnal unregenerate man alone that needs to offer this petition: it is here offered by "the virgins," "the upright[m]," who already love their Lord: and it is necessary to be offered by all, as long as they continue in the body. There are times and seasons when the most favoured of mankind are comparatively dead and dull: even "the wise virgins," as well as the foolish ones, for a time "slumbered and slept." Again and again does every member of the Church need to be awakened, and to have his sluggishness overcome by fresh communications of Divine grace, and fresh manifestations of the Saviour's love. Continually do we need to be "drawn with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love[n]:" and therefore we must continually renew the same petition, as the Church offers in our text.]

2. Her resolution—

[It is no reluctant service which the Bride will render, when once she feels the attractions of the Bridegroom's love. No: she will "run after him:" she will run with all her might: she will regard no obstacles without; she will yield to no impediments within: she will "run and not be weary; she will press forward, and not faint[o]." The space she has already passed, she will account nothing: "forgetting the things that are behind, she will press forward for that which is before, if by any means she may apprehend that, for which she has been apprehended of God in Christ Jesus[p]."

The

[k] John vi. 44. [l] Ps. cxv. 5—8. [m] See the close of ver. 4.
[n] Hos. xi. 4. [o] Isai. xl. 29—31. [p] Phil. iii. 12—14.

The change of *person* also is here remarkable: "Draw *me*, and *we* will run after thee." Not only will the Church summon all the powers of her soul, and unite them all in the service of her Lord, but she will bring all she can along with her. When once she feels the constraining influence of Christ's love, she will not be content to come alone: she would impress every creature that she beholds, with the same love which she herself feels, and would bring all others into the very same union with him which she herself affects. And herein her love differs from that which is here used to set it forth: the love which is felt towards an earthly object, admits not of participation with others: it would engross all the affections of its beloved object, and not endure a rival: but the Church's love to Christ is enhanced by the most extended communication of the blessings which she herself enjoys. She would have all the earth to know, and love him. Just as Andrew, and Philip, as soon as they found the Messiah, invited Peter and Nathanael to come and participate their joy, so does every member of the Church of Christ: he will, like Abraham, "command his household" to fear and love his Lord, and will use all possible means to extend the kingdom of his Redeemer throughout all the earth.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. What reason we have to seek the knowledge of Christ—

[Who is there that has such a title to our affections as he? Who is there so excellent in himself, or such a source of blessedness to them that love him? Go through the universe; survey every thing that stands in competition with him; and see what it can do for your souls. Take that highest of earthly bliss, which is here used to shadow forth the blessedness of union with Christ: how often have they been disappointed who have most passionately sought, and fondly hoped that they had attained, the summit of human happiness! And where it has been enjoyed in its utmost perfection, how soon has it been cut short by the hand of death! But nothing can damp, and nothing can terminate, the blessedness of those who are united to Christ. On the contrary, in the midst of the deepest distresses, his love will fill you with the richest consolation. When a fainting fit has come upon the body, a strong and pungent odour will revive it: and so will the fragrance of Jesu's name refresh the soul, when nothing else under heaven will reach, and resuscitate, its languid powers. O let every one of you seek this union, and never rest till you can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his[q]!"

Yet let me remind you of a most important distinction that must

[q] Cant. ii. 16.

must ever be made between *the knowledge* of Christ, and "*the savour* of the knowledge of him[r]." That which resides in the head will be of no avail, as bringing you into union with him: it is that only which diffuses a fragrance through the whole soul, that will terminate in the everlasting enjoyment of him in heaven.]

2. In what way we should testify our regard for him—

[Seek him continually, and with your whole hearts; and whenever you find sluggishness creeping upon you, renew your cry to him, "Draw me, draw me!" Your "hearts are bent to backslide from him," yea, prone too to alienate from him the affections that should centre in him alone: but strive that you may be able at all times to say with David, "My soul followeth hard after thee:" and if at any time you are enabled to lay hold on your Beloved, let him not go, but "cleave to him with full purpose of heart."

At the same time see what you can do in your families, in your neighbourhood, and in the world at large, to bring others also to him. Commend him to them: endeavour to bring them into the assemblies, where he manifests his presence: intreat him to extend his attractive influences to them also, even as he has done to you: and labour that, if possible, all the world may behold his beauty, and be comforted with his love.

As for yourselves, look to the final consummation of your love in a better world, when your fruition of him shall be more intimate than it can be in this world, and shall continue without intermission or alloy through all eternity.]

[r] 2 Cor. ii. 14.

CCCCLXXXII.

THE CHURCH'S FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST.

Cant. ii. 1—3. *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight; and his fruit was sweet to my taste.*

FROM the general scope of this whole poem, we can have no hesitation in saying, that the words which we have read are a part of a dialogue between Christ and his Church; the former part containing his

his testimony respecting her; and the latter, her testimony respecting him. It is a kind of pastoral song, as the images used by both the parties shew; and, though exceeding difficult of interpretation in some parts, it is very intelligible and instructive in others. We must bear in mind, that Christ speaks as the Bridegroom of his Church; and the Church, as his Spouse: whilst the "sons" and "daughters" mentioned in our text, are those Children of Adam who yet lie in darkness and the shadow of death, or, at best, have only "the form of godliness, without the power." As for the "Daughters of Jerusalem," who occasionally bear a part in the dialogue, they are professors of religion, who, though friendly on the whole, are not yet brought into this near relation to Christ, nor made partakers of his saving benefits.

In discoursing on the words before us, we shall consider,

I. Christ's testimony respecting his Church—

The commendation bestowed upon her is the highest she could possibly receive: it is, that she, according to the measure of grace given to her, resembles him. In order to point out the resemblance,

He first declares his own character—

["I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." Whatever is most excellent in the universe, is brought forward from time to time, to designate and illustrate the character of our Lord. Of the heavenly bodies he is the Sun, "the Sun of Righteousness." Of inferior creatures, he is the Lion, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." Even the plants and flowers yield him honour also: as the rose is exceeded by none in fragrance, and the lily is pre-eminent in beauty, he is a rose, "the rose of Sharon," whose excellence was proverbial[a]; and a lily, "the lily of the valleys," to which Solomon in all his glory was not worthy to be compared[b]. Infinitely diversified are his perfections. In whatever point of view we consider him, his *person*, his *offices*, his *relations*, we shall be fully convinced, that to him alone pertain the garments which were "made for *glory* and *beauty*[c]." In *his person* are united all the attributes of the Deity, and all the grace of humanity in their highest possible perfection——In *his offices*, nothing

[a] Isai. xxxv. 2. [b] Matt. vi. 29. [c] Exod. xxviii. 40.

nothing is wanting that could contribute to the welfare of his Church and people. As their *High Priest*, he has made a full and all-sufficient atonement for them: as their *Prophet*, he instructs them by his word and Spirit; and as their *King*, he rules over them, and in them; and puts all their enemies under their feet ——— As for *his relations*, there is no relation that can inspire us with hope and confidence, which he does not bear towards his believing people. He is our Shepherd, our Brother, and our Friend. Whether viewed in his exaltation, as God; or in his humiliation, as Man; or in his Mediatorial state, as "Emmanuel, God with us," he is infinitely great and glorious, "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely."]

He then acknowledges her resemblance to him—

[To the glories of his Godhead no creature can bear any true Resemblance; so infinitely is he above all: but in his humiliation he was a pattern both of lowliness and purity, to which his believing people are conformed: yea moreover, as he in this respect infinitely excels the highest of his creatures, so does his Church excel all others of "the daughters" of men: she is, like him, "a lily;" like him also, "a lily among thorns;" no others bearing any more comparison with her, than a thorn or brier with the lily. Mark the lowliness of the true Christian: he boweth down his head with a sense of his own unworthiness, and manifold infirmities: yet is he "pure," at least in purpose and desire, "even as God is pure." "The very same mind is in him that was in Christ Jesus:" yea, "being joined to the Lord, he is one spirit with him;" "a partaker of his holiness," "a partaker of his very nature[cc]," "created anew after his image in righteousness and true holiness." Compare the Church with others, and they are no better than "thorns" before her; so superior is she to them in all her principles, her purposes, her attainments. The one have no higher aim or end than self: the other disdains to act but from the love of God, and for the glory of his name. The one leave God out even from the most sacred exercises; the other brings him into the most common acts of offices of life[d]. The one have no life but what they received from nature: the other has Christ himself living in her; yea, "Christ himself is her life[e]." True it is, that by nature the Believer was not at all different from others, but grace has made the difference; according to that prophetic declaration; "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall grow up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off[f]." Thus is that amply verified which was spoken

[cc] 2 Pet. i. 4. [d] 1 Cor. x. 31. [e] Col. iii. 4. [f] Isai. lv. 13.

spoken by Solomon, "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour[g]."]

In reply to this commendation, the Church proclaims,

II. Her testimony respecting him—

This she bears,

1. From her knowledge of his excellencies—

[Christ is "as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood." Other trees can afford shadow only; whilst to those who take refuge under him, he administers the most refreshing and satisfying food. Under them, the soul that continues to abide, must perish: but the soul that abides in him, shall live for ever. All that it can want or desire is found in him. He is "the tree of life, that bears twelve manner of fruits[h];" one for every season, every situation, every circumstance of life. "The very leaves of that tree are for the healing of the nations." The law appeared to offer a salutary retreat: but it could never satisfy the hungry soul, or "make a man perfect as pertaining to the conscience." But what not all the trees of that forest could do, Christ has done[i]; and does continually for all who seek repose under the shadow of his wings. And they who have the clearest views of his excellency, "determine to know nothing but him, even him crucified."]

2. From her experience of his love—

[The Church here says, in fact, "What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, and my hands have handled of the word of life, the same declare I unto you." In fact, no other knowledge than that which has been wrought into our own experience, is of any use; at least, not for the Christian's own benefit. Hear then the Church's happy experience; "I sat down under his shadow with great delight; and his fruit was sweet unto my taste." The Believer has come to Christ weary and heavy-laden with a sense of his sins, and has found rest unto his soul. Like the traveller fainting beneath the intense heat of a vertical sun, he has sought the shade in Christ Jesus, who has approved himself all-sufficient, even like "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land[k]." Of his fruits too does the Believer eat in rich abundance. Oh! how sweet is his pardoning love to the soul, when he says, "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace!" Who can describe the blessedness of that peace which proceeds from him; from Him who said, "My peace I give unto you?" Truly it is "a peace that passeth all understanding." As for the joy with which these manifestations are accompanied,

[g] Prov. xii. 26. [h] Rev. xxii. 2. [i] Rom. viii. 2.
[k] Isai. xxi. v. 4. & xxxii. 2.

panied, it is "unspeakable and glorified." How can a soul feel any thing but exquisite "delight," when thus favoured with "the spirit of adoption," yea, "the witness of the Spirit" also, attesting its relation to Christ, "sealing it unto the day of redemption," and giving it even now "an earnest" and a foretaste "of its heavenly inheritance"? Such are the fruits of which every one shall eat, who sits under the shadow of the Lord Jesus; and "sweet shall they be unto his taste," even "sweeter than honey or the honey-comb."]

Having no fear that either of these testimonies shall ever be set aside, we ground upon them a word of EXHORTATION—

1. Let us contemplate the excellencies of the Lord Jesus—

[There is not any thing in the world which may not serve to illustrate his beauty: for, in fact, all created excellencies are but rays of his glory, and stars twinkling with his reflected splendor. We do not think enough of HIM: we can admire beauty in the creature, but have no eyes to behold it in Him who is the centre and source of all. Did we but duly reflect on him, we should pant after an union with him; and despise every thing else in comparison of him. "All other knowledge would be to us but as dross and dung." Truly "his name is as ointment poured forth; and therefore do the virgins love him[l]." Say, Believer, Is he not "precious[m]" to thy soul? O that every one amongst us would be persuaded to go into this garden, and compare the fragrance of this "Rose," and the purity of this "lily," with all that ever his eyes beheld, or his most impassioned sense experienced! O that all might "behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father;" "the brightness of whose glory he is, and the express image of his person[n]!" The effect of such a sight cannot be conceived by those who never yet beheld it: for we should be constrained by it to cry out, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty[o]!" and, whilst beholding his glory, we should be "changed into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God[oo]." Go, beloved, into the holy mount, and converse with him; and you shall come down, like Moses, irradiated with the beams of his glory. Be conversant with this "lily," and ye shall become "lilies" yourselves.]

2. Let us receive kindly his overtures—

[We have before shewn, that this is a dialogue between Christ as a Bridegroom, and the Church as his Spouse. Into this

[l] Cant. i. 2. [m] 1 Pet. ii. 7. [n] John i. 14. Heb. i. 3.
[o] Zech. ix. 17. [oo] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

this relation Christ is desirous to bring us all. We come in his name, to invite you all to unite yourselves with him; we come, that we may "present every soul among you as a chaste virgin to Christ[p]." Hear the invitation given, as it were, from his own lips: "I will betroth thee unto me for ever: yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies: I will betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord[q]." Beloved Brethren, Who is there that has such a title to your affections as He? Who can make you so happy as he? Have not all other sources of comfort proved as "broken cisterns, that can hold no water?" Why then will ye not "come to the fountain of living waters"?

Say not, "I am unworthy of this high honour." Who is not unworthy? Who could ever have obtained it by any worthiness of his own? Every creature that was ever united to him was first a wretched, helpless outcast, like thyself[r]: and, if thou desire an union with him, be assured that "he will never cast thee out." Only "come to his banqueting-house, and his banner over thee shall be love[s]."]

3. Let us duly estimate our privileges—

[The happiness of the soul that is united unto Christ, no words can declare, no imagination can conceive. Only hear the terms in which He and his Spouse speak of each other: her he calls, "My Love:" and of him she speaks in that endearing term, "My Beloved." Think, for a moment, what immense, what inconceivable privileges are implied in these terms, whether as applied by him to us, or by us to him! Whatever he *is*, he is for you: whatever he *has*, he possesses for you: whatever he *does*, he does for you; whatever he *enjoys*, he enjoys as your Head, your Representative, your Forerunner: "The glory which his Father has given him, *He* has given you." You may enjoy earthly sweets, and they will cloy; yea, the most fragrant rose will fade. Not so "the Rose of Sharon:" its fragrance will be undiminished to all eternity. You may sit under the shadow of other trees, and their foliage shall fail; yea, like Jonah's gourd, they may wither in a night: but not so "the apple-tree that grows in the midst of the Paradise of God:" there is no worm at the root of that: its benign influence shall endure for ever; and its delicious fruits be ever new. Make then these things your own, by "apprehending Christ," and giving yourselves up to him: for "all things are yours, if ye be Christ's." Only "taste, and see, how gracious the Lord is:" and having once "tasted that the Lord is gracious," you will never rest till you can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his."]

4. Let

[p] 2 Cor. xi. 2. [q] Hos. ii. 19, 20. [r] Ezek. xvi. 4—8. [s] ver. 4.

4. Let us walk worthy of our high relation—

[If one be brought into union with an earthly monarch, she feels an obligation to conduct herself henceforth in a way suited to her high calling. And shall not we, when united to "the King of kings?" Yes: we must resemble him, and exhibit, according to the measure of the grace conferred upon us, the mind that was in him. Let us especially resemble him in his humility and purity. We are not indeed to "bow down our heads as a bulrush," as if we were in a pitiable and disconsolate state: but to bow our heads as "the lily," is our beauty and our excellence. Never does the Christian look so beautiful as when he is "low in his own eyes." Surely whatever may have been done for us, and in us, we must still to our latest hour "walk humbly with God." We must also be pure and spotless as the lily; yea, "blameless and harmless as the sons of God." We must not be contented with low attainments; but must seek to "walk worthy of the Lord himself," "whose we are, and whom we profess to serve." Let this be the one object of our ambition: and, as we profess to surpass every flower of the field in fragrance and beauty, let us so live, that we may not fear a comparison with any of the sons of men. Let us not be found vain boasters of privileges that are merely ideal: but, whilst we profess to enjoy so much in and through the Lord Jesus, let it be seen, that, "having this hope, we do indeed purify ourselves even as he is pure[t]."

[t] 1 John iii. 3.

CCCCLXXXIII.

PERSEVERANCE CROWNED WITH SUCCESS.

Cant. iii. 1—4. *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth; I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city; in the streets, and in the broad ways, I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth. I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.*

ONE peculiar excellence of the Song of Solomon is, that it delineates with admirable beauty and precision the workings of the Believer's soul under all the

the varieties of Christian experience. In the first conversion of the soul, God communicates his blessings unsolicited, unsought; so that it may be justly said, "He is found of them that sought them not[a]:" but in our subsequent walk with God, we may sometimes find occasion to complain, "I sought him, but I found him not." Thus it was with the Bride in the passage before us: and her conduct under these circumstances is instructive, as the issue of it is encouraging to the Church of God in all ages. In our remarks on the Bride's experience, we shall notice,

1. Her persevering exertions—

When it is said, "By night on my bed I sought him," we are not to take the words in a *literal*, but *figurative* sense, as expressing the cold and listless way in which the Bride had sought her Beloved: and it is no wonder that, when sought in such a way, he did not vouchsafe to manifest himself unto her. Disappointed in her hopes, "she rose, and went about the city, seeking him in the streets and broad ways," accounting no time unseasonable, no labour too great, for the attainment of an object so dear to her as a sight of her Beloved. Still however her labour was in vain: "she sought him, but found him not." And thus the Lord Jesus Christ still frequently for a season suspends the manifestations of his love, and leaves in darkness the soul that seeks him. This he does,

1. To correct our lukewarmness—

[Lukewarmness in his people is most offensive to him[b]; and, when indulged, "grieves his Spirit," and provokes him to hide his face from us. He has told us in the Prophets, that we must not expect to "find him, unless we seek him with our whole hearts[c]." How solemn is that warning which he has given in his Gospel; "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate: for many shall *seek* to enter in, and shall not be able[d]." What wonder is it therefore if he punish our sloth by a long suspension of his visits, and make us to eat of the bitter fruit of our own ways? By such a dispensation he plainly says to us, "Hast thou not procured this to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken

[a] Isai. lxv. 1. [b] Rev. iii. 16. [c] Jer. xxix. 12, 13.

forsaken me, when I led thee by the way? Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see, that it is an evil and bitter thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God[d]."]

2. To stimulate our desires after him—

[Our souls ought to "pant after him, as the hart after the water-brooks; yea, they should "break for the very fervent desire which we have towards him[f]." But if a listless and inoperative wish would suffice, we should never exert ourselves as we ought. Had the Bride succeeded by seeking her Beloved on her bed, she would never have risen to seek him in the streets of the city: and, if we could attain in a way of self-indulgence the rewards of self-denying exertion, we should be too ready to say to our souls, "Soul, take thine ease." But our Lord has told us, that his favour is not to be sought in such a way as that: he has said, that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence;" and that the violent must take it by force:" and he withholds from us the manifestations of his love, on purpose that he may quicken us in our pursuit of him, and stimulate us to put forth into activity the devoutest energies of our souls[g].]

3. To endear his presence to us—

[To the temporary loss which the Bride had sustained must be ascribed the zeal with which she afterwards held fast her Beloved: and we well know how the Courts of the Lord were endeared to David by his long banishment from them, under the persecutions of Saul, and during the rebellion of Absalom. And, no doubt, in proportion as we are led into deep waters, will be our gratitude for deliverance from them[h]: in proportion as we have passed through the afflictive scenes of David,———will be the zeal and ardour with which we shall henceforth make boast of our great Deliverer: "Who is so great a God as our God[i]?" When we feel that we have "had much forgiven us, we shall love much."]

The Bride however used not her exertions in vain; as we see by,

II. The successful issue of them—

[In her search after her Beloved, she inquired of the watchmen, whether they had seen him, or could give her any intelligence respecting him. And, soon after she had parted with them, she found him. By "the watchmen" we understand the Ministers of God, who "watch for souls," whose special commission is, to "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and to say to the fearful heart, Fear not;

[d] Luke xiii. 24. [e] Jer. ii. 17, 19. [f] Ps. cxix. 20.
[g] Hos. v. 15. [h] Ps. xl. 1—3. [i] Ps. lxxvii. 1—4, 13.

not; your God will come and save you[k]." And it should seem that it was in following their directions she attained her end. But, however this might be, we see clearly from her example, that persevering endeavours shall be crowned with success.]

This is expressly promised by God himself—

[Exceedingly strong is that declaration of our blessed Lord; "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened[l]." It is not said indeed that the answer shall be given, as it was to Daniel, in the very act of prayer: but it is secured from the first moment that we ask in faith; and it shall be given in the best manner, and the fittest time; according as the prophet Hosea has said; "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and the former rain, unto the earth[m]." "The vision is for an appointed time: and if we wait for it, it shall come, and not tarry an instant beyond the time" fixed in the counsels of unerring wisdom[n].]

It is also confirmed by natural experience—

[The poor Canaanitess who was so urgent in her supplications to Christ to come and heal her daughter, met with a denial; and such a denial as seemed to preclude any hope of ultimate success; "He answered her not a word." The Disciples then interceded for her, and requested, that she might be dismissed with a favourable answer, if it was only to prevent her from wearying them with her intreaties: yet they also were refused, and in such a manner as effectually to silence them: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Still however she would not give up all hope, but with deeper prostration than before renewed her petition: but the answer she received was more discouraging than before, in that it blamed her presumption in hoping to participate in any respect the blessings which were designed only for God's peculiar people: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it unto dogs." Who would believe, that, after all this, she should persevere in her request, and succeed at last? Yet so she did[o]: and such shall be the success of every child of man that "continues instant in prayer." To this effect our Lord assures us, in a parable which was spoken for the express purpose of encouraging persons "to pray and not faint." A poor widow, we are told, obtained redress from an unjust judge through mere dint

[k] Isai. xxxv. 3, 4. [l] Matt. vii. 7, 8. [m] Hos. vi. 3.
[n] Hos. ii. 3. & Heb. x. 37. [o] Matt. xv. 22—28.

dint of her importunity: and from thence we are taught to draw this inference; "And shall not God avenge his own elect who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily[p]." Here then we are warranted in affirming that the Bride's success shall be realized in us, if only, like her, we rise to the occasion, and press through every impediment to the enjoyment of our God. God "never did, nor ever will, say to any, Seek ye my face in vain."]

But that we may profit more fully by the example of the Bride, let us notice,

III. The use she made of her success—

Having found her beloved, she held him and would not let him go, till she had brought him into her mother's house, where she hoped her communion with him would be more intimate, and free from interruption. And thus should we also,

1. Exert ourselves to retain the Saviour with us—

[There is a holy violence which we are permitted to use, like that of Jacob, who "wrestled all night with the Angel, and said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me[q]." But how often, for want of this, is our enjoyment of the Saviour short and transient, "like the early dew, or the morning cloud that passeth away!" We should "stir ourselves up to lay hold on him;" and, if he would leave us, we must constrain him, as the Disciples at Emmaus did, to take up his abode with us[r]. We should dread nothing so much as the loss of his presence: and knowing what a holy and jealous God he is, we should strive with all imaginable care to hold him fast, and avoid every thing which may "grieve his Spirit," and provoke him to depart from us.]

2. Seek to enjoy the most intimate communion with him—

[The Church, "which is the Mother of us all[s]," may be considered as the place to which the Bride strove to bring her Beloved. And we also, both in the closet and the Church, should seek such manifestations of his love, as cannot be enjoyed in the noise and bustle of the world. In all the ordinances of his grace, and at his holy table especially, we should labour to insure his presence; since without him they are only "as wells without water," which "fill with shame and confusion" the thirsty soul[t]. Nor be satisfied with any small communi-

[p] Luke xviii. 1—8. [q] Gen. xxxii. 24—28.
[r] Luke xxiv. 28, 29. [s] Gal. iv. 26. [t] Jer. xiv. 3.

communications of his grace and peace: seek the largest possible measure of them, even to "be filled with all the fulness of God." In a word, so "dwell in him, and let him dwell in you;" and so be "one with him, and let him be one with you;" that you may even now, in communion with him, have an earnest of the blessedness of heaven, even of that joy, all "fulness of which is at his right hand for evermore."]

From her example, let us LEARN,

1. To fix our hearts supremely on the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Four times does the Bride designate him by this character, "Him whom my soul loveth." Let him be familiarized to us also under the same endearing name. O let him be in our estimation "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely;" so that, if he interrogate us as he did Peter, Lovest thou me? we may be able to make the same appeal to him as Peter did, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."]

2. Not to indulge sloth in our pursuit of him—

["The idle soul shall suffer hunger; but the diligent soul shall be made fat." What darkness have many brought upon their souls by their unwatchfulness! Peter was warned by our Lord to "watch and pray, that he might not enter into temptation." But Peter slept; and, though repeatedly awaked and reproved, gave way to sloth again, the instant he was left to himself. What advantage Satan took of him, we all know, and what were the bitter fruits of his supineness. Let *us* "be sober and vigilant." Let us not pray "upon our bed," as regardless whether we are heard or not, but let us "stir up ourselves to lay hold on Christ;" and then "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart." If we would succeed in our pursuit of heavenly joys, we must not only pray, but "watch unto prayer with all perseverance."]

3. Not to yield to despondency, because we find him not so present with us as we could wish—

[We are very apt to be impatient under the hidings of his face, and to conclude, that he has utterly forsaken us. This was the fault of the Church in the days of old: but God expostulated with her, and reproved her[u] ——— and assured her, that she was so indelibly engraven on the palms of his hands, that he could not possibly forget her[x]: he might indeed "forsake her for a moment, but with everlasting kindness would he have mercy upon her[y]." If then similar fears arise in your breast, say as David did, after he had unhappily given way

[u] Isai. xl. 28—31. [x] Isai. xlix. 14—16. [y] Isai. liv. 7, 8.

way to them, "This is mine infirmity[z]." Be assured, that God, who is faithful to his promises, "will never leave you nor forsake you[a]:" that "if you seek him, he will be found of you[b]:" and that "in due season you shall reap, if you faint not[c]."]

[z] Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.
[a] Heb. xiii. 5, 6.
[b] 2 Chron. xv. 2.
[c] Gal. vi. 9.

CCCCLXXXIV.

SPIRITUAL SLOTH REPROVED.

Cant. v. 2—8. *I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake; I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.*

TWO things we should guard against in reading the Song of Solomon; namely, the laying an undue stress on particular *words*, and the dwelling too minutely on particular *circumstances*. There is a latitude due to the very species of composition, that may well exempt it from severe criticism, and from an over-strained application of its several parts. No one can have ever read the holy Scriptures without seeing many expressions, which modern delicacy and refinement constrain us to pass over, as offensive to our ears. These expressions occur both in the Law and in the Prophets; and therefore we cannot wonder if they occur in a composition intended to exhibit the mutual love subsisting between Christ and his Church, and shadowing it forth under the most

most delicate of all images, the mutual regards of a Bridegroom and his Bride. Allowance must be made for the customs of different nations: a thing may be not at all improper in one age or country, which in another age and country would be highly indecorous, as not being sanctioned by common usage. Besides, there are many customs which obtained in the days of Solomon, which, if they were known to us, would reflect light on many parts of this poem, which are involved in obscurity because we want the key to the explanation of them. Even what we do know must be touched upon with the greatest delicacy, lest what was written only for the inflaming of our spiritual affections, should become rather an occasion of evil. The true way to profit by this Book is to take the general scope of it, rather than its particular images, as the subjects for our reflection. And, if we attend to this rule, we shall find the passage which we have now read, replete with instruction. It informs us of the reproof which the Bride received for the indifference with which on one occasion she treated her beloved.

Let us distinctly notice,

I. The indolence she indulged—

She was in a state, not of absolute sleep, like the ungodly world, but of slumber, half asleep, and half awake; "I sleep, but my heart waketh."

Moreover, when her beloved came to hold communion with her, she was inattentive to his voice: yea, notwithstanding he addressed her in terms of most endeared affection, and complained of the inconvenience he had sustained through her unwatchfulness, she still gave but little heed to his voice. In hot countries, "the night dews" are not only strong, but often very injurious to those who are exposed to them: yet even this consideration did not operate to produce in her that activity which the occasion required.

Instead of rising at his call, she urged vain and foolish excuses to justify her neglect; and in fact

told him, that his visit at that time was unacceptable. These excuses were only a cloak for her own sloth and self-indulgence: had her graces been in lively exercise, the obstacles she complained of would have vanished in an instant. This conduct gives a striking picture of what too generally obtains amongst ourselves: it shews,

1. Our slothful habits—

[There is in the very best of men "the flesh yet lusting against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit striving against the flesh, so that they cannot do the things they would[a]." Even St. Paul complained, that, whilst with his mind he served the law of God, with his flesh he was still in some measure subjected to the law of sin, not indeed as a willing servant, but as a captive, who in vain sought a perfect deliverance from that detested enemy[b]. True indeed, where due vigilance is kept up, "the old man" cannot gain any permanent advantage: but even when "the spirit is willing, the flesh is too often weak;" and all in some degree find, that "when they would do good, evil is present with them." It is indeed greatly to be lamented, that "the wise virgins" should ever so resemble the foolish virgins, as to "slumber and sleep" like them: but so, alas! it is: and when, by reason of our failures, we are ready to complain, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!" we need the rebuke which was given to that petition, "Awake, awake, stand, up, O Jerusalem, and put on thy strength, O Zion[c]!"]

2. Our insensibility to the kindness of our beloved—

[How inexpressibly tender are his addresses to us! See the invitations, the intreaties, the expostulations that pervade every part of the Sacred Volume; and say whether they be not sufficient to melt the most obdurate heart? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me[d]." Yet how long does he stand and knock in vain! His pleadings too, how kind, how gracious, how forcible they are! "Have I been a wilderness to Israel? Wherefore say my people, we will come no more unto thee[e]? "Turn ye unto me; for I have redeemed you: I am even married unto you[f]:" "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, O House of Israel?" But all his expostulations have been to no purpose with respect to the generality; and even on the best they are far from

[a] Gal. v. 17. [b] Rom. vii. 14, 18, 22, 23. [c] Isai. li. 9, 17. & lii. 1.
[d] Rev. iii. 20. [e] Jer. ii. 31. [f] Jer. iii. 12, 14.

from operating to the extent they ought. St. Paul could say, "The love of Christ constraineth us," or carries us away like a mighty torrent: but how many are the seasons when his attractions are not so felt by us, and when, instead of regarding him as "the chiefest among ten thousand," we see scarcely any "beauty or comeliness in him for which he is to be desired!"]

3. Our vain excuses with which we cloke our sins—

[*Something arising out of our present circumstances* we are ready to plead in extenuation at least, if not in excuse, for our sloth. But, if we would deal faithfully with ourselves, we should see that all our pleas are a mere cloak for self-indulgence: we are called to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," but we do not like self-denial: to "mortify our earthly members" is a work in which we cannot bear to engage: the "cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye" is so painful to us, that we cannot be prevailed upon to put forth the resolution it requires. We promise ourselves a "more convenient season," which in too many instances never comes at all. Like those in the parable, we find some reason for declining the invitations sent us, and return for answer, "I pray thee have me excused"———]

A due consideration of her fault will prepare our minds for,

II. The reproof she met with—

At last, beginning to see her error, she rose to open to her beloved: and with such ardour of affection did she open to him, that "myrrh dropped, as it were, from her hands upon the handle of the lock." But behold, he was gone; and though she sought him, she could not find him; and though she called after him, he gave her no answer. The watchmen too reproved her with great severity, as questioning even the sincerity of one who could so treat the beloved of her soul. And such reproof must we all expect, if we give way to sloth instead of watching unto prayer. We must expect,

1. That he will depart from us—

[Verily he is "a God who hideth himself," a holy and a jealous God, that will make us to "eat of the fruit of our own ways, and to be filled with our own devices." He has warned us not to "grieve his Holy Spirit," lest he depart from us. I "will go and return to my place," says he, "till they acknowledge their offence[g]." And oh! how painful are the seasons when

[g] Hos. v. 15.

when he withdraws from us, and leaves our souls in darkness! Even he himself, when for our sins he was deserted of his God, how bitterly did he cry; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" O that we may never provoke him to put that cup into our hands! How distressing will it be to be reduced to any measure of that experience which Christ endured for us; "O my God, why art thou so far from helping me, and from the voice of my roaring? I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent[h]!" See David in this predicament[i]———, and "let us be instructed, lest we provoke him to depart from us also."]

2. That the word and ordinances shall be unproductive of any solid comfort to us—

[The "Watchmen" are the Ministers, whose office is not only to instruct and comfort, but also to warn and "rebuke with all authority." True it is, they may be too hasty and severe in their reproofs; and may by such indiscreet zeal make the heart of the righteous sad, when they should rather bind up the broken heart, and heal the wounded spirit. But it is possible also, that they may be too lenient, and "speak peace to persons when there is no peace." But where there is no fault in their ministrations, God may make their word as a sword, to enter into the very bones of those who hear it, and to cut them to the heart. Even the prómises, when held forth in all their fulness and all their freeness, may afford no comfort to the soul of one who is under the hidings of God's face, but may add tenfold poignancy to all his griefs. How unhappy was the state of David, when even the thought of God himself was a source of sorrow and despondency, rather than of joy and peace! "He remembered God, and was troubled; and his soul refused comfort." In like manner, all the wonders of redeeming love may be made a source of the deepest anguish to our souls, by the apprehension that we have no part or lot in them. If then we would not bring these heavy judgments on our souls, let us "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who yet enjoy the light of God's countenance—

[Happy, happy are ye, in the possession of this rich mercy! Surely such a state is a foretaste of heaven itself. But do not presume upon it. Do not say, "My mountain stands strong; I shall never be moved;" lest ye cause God to "hide his face from you, and ye be troubled." "Be not high-minded; but fear." Keep upon your watch-tower: "let your

[h] Matt. xxii. 1, 2. [i] Ps. xlii. 3. & lxxvii. 6—9.

your loins be girt, and your lamps trimmed;" and watch every moment for the coming of your Lord. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."]

2. Those who are under the hidings of their Redeemer's face—

[If others are not to presume, so neither are you to despond. "If your sorrow endure for a night, there is joy awaiting you in the morning." This do: imitate the Bride in the passage before us. She desired the prayers and intercessions of the saints, and intreated them, in their seasons of communion with their Lord, to plead her cause: "I charge you, when you shall see him, tell him that I am sick of love." She felt no grief like the absence of her beloved; and could find comfort in nothing but the restoration of his love. Thus let your hearts be fixed on him; even on him only: and suffer nothing to weaken your regards to him. Never entertain hard thoughts of him. Take shame to yourselves, till ye even lothe yourselves in dust and ashes: but relax neither your love to him, nor your confidence in him. Say with yourselves, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Then will he in due season return to your souls, so that "your light shall rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day." Only be content to "go on your way weeping, bearing the precious seed of penitence and faith; and you shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you."]

CCCCLXXXV.

TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCIES OF CHRIST.

Cant. v. 9. *What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?*

THOUGH zeal in every earthly pursuit is approved and commended, it is almost universally banished from the concerns of religion. The most temperate exertions are deemed excessive, and a moderate degree of solicitude is called enthusiasm. Even they who profess Godliness are too often found ready to damp the ardour, which persons, more active than themselves, may at any time express—Thus the Bride was checked in her inquiries after her Beloved.—The "Daughters of Jerusalem," who keep up the dialogue with the Bride and Bridegroom, seem to be either formal professors of religion, or

to

to have made a very small progress in the Divine life—And *they*, when the Bride, under great trouble and anxiety, requested their intercession, reflected on her as manifesting an intemperate and needless zeal.—But we will answer their questions, by shewing,

I. The excellencies of our Beloved—

Who the Beloved of the Church is, we need not declare; since it is too manifest to admit a doubt—There is not a member of that body who does not regard *Jesus* with supreme affection—Nor is there any apology needed for such a choice—His excellencies are exceeding great—

[In him are concentred all the glories of *the Godhead*[a]—Being the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, he must of necessity possess all the Divine perfections[b]—To search out these perfections is beyond the ability of any finite being[c]—But to love and adore him on account of them is the duty and privilege of all his people—The excellencies of *his human nature* may be more easily declared—There his glory is veiled, so that we may behold and contemplate it without being blinded by its overwhelming splendor—He was not only holy, but holiness itself, without spot or blemish—His most inveterate enemies, Satan himself not accepted, could not find a flaw in him[d]—And God himself has borne testimony, that in him was no sin[e]—*As Mediator*, he united both the Godhead and the Manhood in his own person, and executed an office which he alone was able to sustain—In that character we behold him reconciling God to man, and man to God[f], yea, glorifying all the perfections of the Deity in the salvation of sinners[g]—Well may we, in this view of him, exclaim, "How great is his goodness, how great is his beauty[h]!"]

But the text requires us to speak of him in a comparative view—

[Surely there is no other object of affection in the universe worthy to be compared with him—*In Whom is there such a marvellous combination of excellencies?* As *God*, as *Man*, and as *Mediator*, he not only unites in himself every perfection proper to the Divine and human nature, but exhibits a character peculiar to himself, a character that is and ever must be the admiration of the whole universe.—*In Whom was there ever found*

[a] Col. ii. 9. [b] Heb. i. 3. [c] Job xi. 7.
[d] John viii. 46. John xiv. 30. [e] 1 John iii. 5. [f] 2 Cor. v. 19.
[g] Rom. iii. 25, 26. [h] Zech. ix. 17.

found any one excellence in so eminent a degree? There have been men wise, and virtuous, and loving; but in him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge[i]; and he was not only virtuous, but virtue itself incarnate; and as for his love, its heights and depths can never be explored[k] — Indeed, whatever excellence has at any time beamed forth in the creature, it has been nothing but a ray reflected from this Sun of Righteousness[l]. — We may ask yet further, *Whose excellencies were ever so beneficial to us?* Others indeed have profited us by their example; but He, by his obedience, has wrought out a righteousness *for us;* a righteousness, wherein the vilest of sinners, if truly penitent, shall stand perfect and complete in the sight of God[m]. — Let the contemptuous inquirer then blush for his ignorance; and acknowledge that our Beloved infinitely transcends every thing that can be put in competition with him.]

According to his excellencies must of necessity be,

II. The regard we owe him—

If we look to the example of the Bride, who well knew how to appreciate his worth, we shall see how we ought to manifest our affection towards him—

1. We should esteem him above every thing in the world—

[The Bride has used every simile that the most fertile imagination could suggest, in order to express her sense of his excellency[n] — David esteemed nothing in heaven or earth in comparison of him[o] — and St. Paul counted all things but dung for the knowledge of him[p] — And if *we* do not see a "beauty and comeliness in him for which he is to be desired" infinitely beyond every thing else, our eyes must be altogether blinded by the god of this world. — Let us then despise every thing in comparison of him, and take him as our portion, our ALL IN ALL.]

2. We should be exceeding careful that we do not grieve him—

[In this also the Bride affords us an excellent example— Frequently does she repeat her tender concern lest by any means he should be provoked to depart from her[q] — Such a holy caution also should *we* continually maintain — He is a holy and jealous God, and will not endure our neglects without manifesting

[i] Col. ii. 3. [k] Eph. iii. 18, 19. [l] 1 Cor. iv. 7.
[m] Rom. v. 18, 19.
[n] Cant. ii. 3. and in ten different particulars v. 10—16.
[o] Ps. lxxiii. 25. [p] Phil. iii. 8. [q] Cant. ii. 7. iii. 5, & viii. 4.

manifesting his displeasure[r]—The Bride herself, notwithstanding her care in general, experienced the loss of his presence, when she became remiss[s]—And thus will he also hide himself from us, if by our unwatchfulness we grieve his holy Spirit—Let us then "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise"—Let us "look to him as our Guardian Angel, and beware of him, and obey his voice, and carefully abstain from every species of provocation[t]."]

3. If at any time we have lost a sense of his presence, we should by all possible means immediately exert ourselves to regain it—

[With what contrition did the Bride arise! How did her very soul faint within her, when she found he was departed! With what earnestness did she call after him! How did she instantly inquire after him, applying to those who from their office and character were best fitted to direct her! How did she persist, notwithstanding all the discouragements she met with! And what a solemn charge did she give to her fellow-saints to intercede for her[u]!—Such should be our conduct under the hidings of his face—We should not sit down in despondency, but labour with more abundant diligence to obtain renewed expressions of his love and favour[x].]

4. If he vouchsafe to visit us again, we should feel ourselves completely happy in him, and yield up ourselves entirely to his will—

[No sooner were the Bride's endeavours crowned with success, than she redoubled her efforts to retain and enjoy him[y]—and earnestly sought to be most intimately, and inseparably united to him[z]—Thus should we seek to "abide in him, and to have him abiding in us[a]"—We should "cleave to him with full purpose of heart"—and, in the possession of his love, our souls should find all that they can desire.[b]—Thrice happy they who are thus influenced by their views of Christ!—Their "labour shall never be in vain"—They shall enjoy the greatest, the only real good, the light of his countenance[c]—and though, in a little wrath, he may hide his face from them, it shall be only for a moment, and with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on them[d].]

It may now be allowed us, not merely to exhort, but to "CHARGE," you all—

[In the name of Almighty God, we "charge" you all to love

[r] Isai. xlv. 15. [s] Cant. v. 3—6. [t] Exod. xxiii. 20, 21.
[u] See each distinct step exemplified: Cant. v. 5—8.
[x] Hos. v. 15. [y] Cant. iii. 2—4. [z] Cant. viii. 1, 2, 6.
[a] John xv. 4. [b] 2 Cor. vi. 10. [c] Ps. iv. 6. [d] Isa. liv. 8.

love the Saviour. If the love, which Believers bear to him, constrains them to be singular, let it be remembered, that *the blame* of singularity does not rest on *them:* as they can "give a reason for the *hope* that is in them," so can they also for their *love* to the Saviour—His transcendent excellencies demand their supreme regard—If they love him with all their heart and soul and mind and strength, it is no more than their bounden duty; yea, their most fervent affections fall infinitely short of his desert—Let all then set their love on *Jesus*—Let them search out his excellencies, till they are ravished with the sight—and let them "cast their idols to the moles and to the bats"—Nor let any be ashamed to confess him before men—It is a small matter to bear the taunts of an ignorant and ungodly world—one hour's enjoyment of Christ's presence will more than counterbalance an age of man's contempt; and if on earth, how much more in heaven!—Dare then to be singular—Shine, Believers, as becomes your relation to the heavenly Bridegroom—Be "the fairest among women," as your Beloved is among men[e]—and let your union with him be discovered by your conformity to his image.]

[e] Ps. xlv. 2—13.

CCCCLXXXVI.

THE CHURCH'S DESIRE OF CHRIST'S LOVE.

Cant. viii. 6, 7. *Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.*

THE more any person enjoys of Christ, the more ardent will be his desires after him, and the more enlarged his petitions for richer communications from him. The Church, as represented in the Song before us, has already been brought into the closest fellowship with her Beloved; yet this, so far from satisfying her, serves only for an occasion of soliciting from him yet further favours, and urging her request with more powerful pleas: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, and upon thine arm; &c." That in this we may be stirred up to follow her example, let us notice,

I. Her request—

To

To fix the import of this, we must determine the precise sense in which the Bride uses the word, "seal." In the general acceptation of that term in Scripture, we understand that which is affixed to deeds or covenants of any kind, in order to ratify and confirm them. Such was that with which Jeremiah's purchase of a field was confirmed[a]; and in reference to such was circumcision appointed to Abraham, as the seal of God's covenant with him, and of the righteousness which he, by faith in that covenant, already possessed[b]; whilst, on the other hand, God's foreknowledge and fore-ordination of his elect is a seal on his part, attesting that that covenant, stands on a sure and immoveable foundation[c]. In a similar sense, the Holy Spirit's work in sanctifying the elect is a seal, whereby he seals them unto the day of redemption, and assures to them their enjoyment of their purchased inheritance[d]. But we apprehend that the use of the term in this place is different; and that it refers to signets which were not uncommonly worn upon the hand or arm, as memorials of persons who were greatly beloved. Such we find mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah; "As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence[e]," utterly unmindful of all my former regards. In this view the Church's request is, that her Beloved would *make her the object of his most endeared affections, and of his continual care.* Now,

This is a proper request from every child of man—

[All without exception are invited to come to Christ[h], and to participate freely his richest blessings[i]. Unworthiness on our part is no bar to our acceptance with him; since all, however elevated and ennobled afterwards, are, previously to their union with him, in the lowest state of guilt[k] and degradation[l]. He, and all his benefits, are to be apprehended simply by faith[m]. Whosoever comes to him by faith is united to him, as a branch to the vine[n], and may expect to receive out of his fulness all that has been treasured up in him for our use and

[a] Jer. xxxii. 10, 11, 14. [b] Rom. iv. 11. [c] 2 Tim. ii. 19.
[d] Eph. i. 13. & iv. 30. [e] Jer. xxii. 24. [h] John vi. 37.
[i] Isai. lv. 1. [k] Rom. iii. 19. [l] Ezek. xvi. 3—12.
[m] John i. 12. [n] John xv. 1—5.

and benefit[o]. We may ask for the entire affections of his soul, and the unlimited exercise of his power, as if there were no other creature in the universe to share his regards. Less than this we ought not to ask. Less than this would not avail for our eternal happiness. We must have all the love of his heart, and all the power of his arm, if we would be brought through all our difficulties and trials to the everlasting enjoyment of him in his kingdom. Whatever the most beloved Bride may hope for from him to whom she is betrothed, that, and infinitely more, may we expect from our heavenly Bridegroom———]

And it shall be fulfilled to all who offer it in Spirit and in truth—

[Christ has solemnly pledged himself to this extent by an everlasting covenant[p]———And he has fulfilled it to millions of the human race, who were once as guilty, as polluted, and as helpless as we———Hence he chides the Church for her doubts, after that he had graven her on the palms of his hands[pp]——— Who can tell the efficacy of fervent and believing prayer? Our God and Saviour could as soon deny himself, as he could withstand it. Instead of rejecting our petitions on account of their being too large, he will approve of them the more, and answer them the sooner, on account of their comprehensiveness and extent: he has said, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it[q]:" "Ye may ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you[r]."]

We shall, however, be more certain of success, if we can follow her in,

II. Her pleas—

Two things in particular she urged on the consideration of her Beloved, in order to prevail on him to grant her request; the one was, that *she could not endure the thought of having a less interest in him than her relation to him required,* and that her "jealousy would burn like coals of fire that had a most vehement flame;" and the other was, that *her love to him was supreme and unalterable;* that it was "stronger than death;" that "no waters could quench it, no floods drown it;" and that, if the richest monarch in the universe would "give all the substance of his house" to engage it for himself, "it would be utterly contemned."

Now in these pleas we see,

1. What

[o] John xv. 7. [p] Jer. xxxii. 40, 41. [pp] Isai. xlix. 14—16.
[q] Ps. lxxxi. 10. [r] John xiv. 13, 14.

1. What distress is occasioned by a doubt of Christ's love to us—

[To have it a doubtful point whether we are children of God and heirs of heaven, or children of the wicked one and heirs of hell, is a source of unutterable anguish to every man who knows what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God." How bitterly did Job bewail his condition, whilst he apprehended God to be his enemy! "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me[s]." David likewise in many of his Psalms pours out similar complaints[t]———Careless and ungodly men can rest satisfied without any inquiries: but an awakened man cannot be so indifferent about his interest in Christ: to him suspense is death: he feels "a jealousy cruel as the grave," (which will never suffer its destined victim to escape,) and devouring, like a flame, which consumes all within its reach.]

2. What consolation arises from a consciousness of our love to him—

[Though there is no *merit* in our love to Christ, it greatly emboldens us in our addresses to him, and gives us a just ground to hope, that he will in due time manifest his love to us, and shed it abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He has expressly said, "I love them that love me[u]; and has assured us, that, if we love him, his Father will love us, and come and make his abode with us[x]." The very circumstance of our love to him is of itself, independent of all other evidences, a proof that he does actually love us: for our love to him is the effect of his love to us; "We love him, because he first loved us[y];" yea, "He loved us with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn us[z]." If then we have within ourselves an evidence, that our love to him is supreme, and that nothing which the world could either offer to us, or inflict upon us, would induce us to surrender our hope in him, we may rest assured, not only that he is ours, but that he will be ours even to the end. We may even make this an argument with him in prayer, as David did, "I am thine: save me[a]!" and as the Church of old did, "Now, O Lord, thou art our Father: we are the clay, and thou our Potter: and we are all the work of thy hand: Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people[b]." Bearing us, as he

[s] Job vi. 4.
[t] Ps. xlii. 1—3. & lxxvii. 1—4, 7—9. & lxxxviii. 1—7. & cii. 1—6, 9—11.
[u] Prov. viii. 17.
[x] John xiv. 21, 23.
[y] 1 John iv. 10, 19. & John xv. 16.
[z] Jer. xxxiii. 3.
[a] Ps. cxix. 94.
[b] Isai. lxiv. 8, 9.

he does, on his shoulders, and on his breast, in his official capacity as our High Priest within the veil[c], we may be sure that "he will never leave us nor forsake us[d]," nor ever suffer any thing to "separate us from his love[e]."]

LEARN from hence,

1. What should be the frame of your minds towards the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Our hearts should be supremely set on him, and we should "count all things but loss for the knowledge of him." So ardent should our love to him be, that no floods of affliction or persecution should ever be able to drown it, nor all that the world can give stand for a moment in competition with it———Examine yourselves, Brethren, and see whether it be really so? Can ye, in answer to the question put by our Lord to Peter, make the reply that Peter did, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?"———]

2. What we should daily look for at his hands—

[Your security and happiness depend altogether upon his unchanging love. Were he to withdraw from underneath you his everlasting arms, you would instantly fall and perish. Intreat him then to "carry you in his bosom," and to "bear you still as upon eagles' wings." Plead with him in earnest prayer; and let him not go until he bestows his blessing upon you. "You are not straitened in him: be not straitened in your own bowels:" and let all the fellowship which you enjoy with him here, be regarded by you as a pledge and earnest of still closer fellowship with him in the regions of eternal light and blessedness.]

[c] Exod. xxviii. 9—12, 21, 29, 30. [d] Heb. xiii. 5.
[e] Rom. viii. 35—39.

CCCCLXXXVII.

GOD'S COMPLAINT AGAINST HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. i. 2, 3. *Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me! The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

IT is the Lord God Almighty that now speaketh respecting us. Let every ear attend; let every heart be humbled in the dust before him. He hath a controversy with us, and a complaint against us: and he summons

summons both heaven and earth to attest the truth of his charge, and the equity of his judgment. Though he is a Sovereign, and amenable to none, yet he does frequently make his appeal to the whole creation, and constitute his creatures judges between himself and us[a]. In this charge we behold,

I. The evil we have committed—

The charge is doubtless in the first place uttered against the Jews—

[God had truly "nourished them, and brought them up as children." He had chosen them to himself, as his peculiar people; he had brought them up out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and an out-stretched arm; he had fed and supported them forty years in the wilderness; he had given them a revelation of his mind and will; and he had planted them in that good land which he had promised to their fathers. In all this he had acted towards them with all the care and tenderness of a most affectionate Parent[b]———

But how had they requited him for all his kindness? From the very beginning did they shew themselves a rebellious and stiff-necked people[c]. They were always murmuring under every succeeding trial, and distrusting God in every difficulty, and in heart going back again to the flesh-pots of Egypt. They were often ready to stone those servants of God who had been the instruments of their deliverance: they retained their idols which they had worshipped in Egypt; and even made a golden calf, as the Representative, or rather, as the Rival and competitor, of Jehovah. In their history we find some seasons of amendment; but, on the whole, they were "a rebellious and gainsaying people."]

But this is no less applicable to ourselves—

[Certainly we are quite as much indebted to the Lord as ever the Jews of old were: for though we have not had such visible interpositions in our favour, we have been no less the objects of his paternal care: and, in that which constituted their "chief advantage," we greatly excel them[d]. "To them were committed the Oracles of God:" but to us is given the Gospel of his dear Son; in comparison of which, the Law, glorious as it was, had no glory at all; being eclipsed as a star before the meridian sun[e]———

And what has been our conduct towards him? Have we been sensible of the benefits conferred upon us; and have we endeavoured to render to him the recompence that was due?

[a] Mic. vi. 2. [b] Deut. i. 31. & xxxii. 9—12. [c] Deut. ix. 24.
[d] Rom. iii. 2. [e] 2 Cor. iii. 7—11.

due? Alas! we have been unmindful of his kindness, and regardless of his authority altogether. It has never entered into our hearts to say, "Come, let us serve the Lord, who hath done such great things for us[f]." Whilst we have violated his holy laws, we have "puffed at his judgments," saying in our hearts, "God seeth not, neither regardeth what we do." If called to obey him, we have replied, in spirit, if not in word, "Who is the Lord, that we should serve him? We know not the Lord, neither will we obey his voice[g]." "Our lips are our own: Who is Lord over us[h]?" In truth, we have lived "without God in the world[i];" and have *practically* said, "There is no God[k]."]

Not content with charging upon us our multiplied rebellions, God proceeds to set forth,

II. The extent of our criminality—

The brute creation demean themselves, for the most part, in a way suited to their several capacities—

[The ox and the ass are amongst the most stupid of the brute creation: yet have they some knowledge of their master, and some sense of their dependence on him. Though fed only for their master's benefit, and used only to subserve his interests, they often express themselves with a kind of grateful acknowledgment towards him.]

But we, notwithstanding our superior advantages, act more irrationally than they—

[We live from year to year on the bounty of our heavenly Father, and yet feel no sense of gratitude towards him. We "do not even consider" our obligations to him. We "do not consider" either *what he has done for us;* (though it is so great, that neither the tongues of men or of angels can ever worthily declare it:) or, *what he requires of us;* (though that should be the subject of our unceasing contemplation:) or, *what return we have hitherto made to him;* (though on that our eternal happiness depends:) or, *what account we shall hereafter give to him;* (though we know not but that before the expiration of another hour we may be summoned into his immediate presence.) In a word, God's testimony respecting us is, that "HE is not in all, or any, of our thoughts[l]." Of the brute creation there are many that act with a degree of foresight and wisdom[m]: but we, who are endued with reason, act a part more irrational than they: and hence are justly reproached by God as more brutish and sottish than even

[f] Jer. ii. 5, 6. & v. 23, 24. [g] Job xxi. 14, 15. Exod. v. 2.
[h] Ps. xii. 4. [i] Eph. ii. 12. [k] Ps. xiv. 1. [l] Ps. x. 4.
[m] Prov. vi. 6—8. Jer. viii. 7.

even the ox and ass[n]. How humiliating is this view of our state, and especially in relation to persons who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son! Verily there is not one amongst us who has not reason to blush and be confounded under the accusations that are brought against us.]

In CONCLUSION, we will,

1. Inquire what plea you can offer in your own behalf?

[We know that the young, the old, the rich, the poor, have all their appropriate excuses: but what plea have they that will avail them at the bar of judgment? Will any deny the charge! Alas! alas! Where is there one amongst us that has not been a rebel from the womb? Where is there one amongst us that has ever equalled the ox or ass in their attachment to him who feeds them, and their willing submission to his yoke? We must confess, every one of us, that we have not so much as considered our obligations, or our duties, or our interests, or our true happiness in any respect, unless we have been renewed in our minds by the Spirit of God himself. Let us then put away all our vain pleas and excuses, and adopt, each of us for himself, the language of Agur; "I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man[o]." If we feel not the depth of our depravity, and refuse to humble ourselves before God, we do in fact "make God a liar," and provoke him to execute upon us the judgments we have deserved.]

2. Suggest a plea which you may offer with safety to your souls—

[Vile as we are, Christ died for us; and his death shall avail even for the chief of sinners. Hear with what confidence it was pleaded by the apostle Paul: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." Does any one imagine that he is unworthy to hope that this plea shall ever avail for him? God himself, at the very time that he most fully expatiates on our guilt, puts this plea into our mouths, and declares that, if we offer it before him, it shall avail for our justification in the last day[p]. Let us then rely simply on the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, and plead his merits at the throne of grace: then, if heaven and earth do testify our desert of eternal condemnation, they shall testify also our affiance in the Divine "promises, which in Christ are yea, and in him Amen, to the everlasting glory of our offended God[q]."]

[n] Jer. iv. 22. & v. 21.
[o] Prov. xxx. 2.
[p] Isai. xliii. 22—26.
[q] 2 Cor. i. 20.

CCCCLXXXVIII.

THE SINFULNESS AND INCORRIGIBLENESS OF THE NATION.

Isai. i. 4, 5. *Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters! they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more.*

THE end for which God inflicts punishment upon his people, is, to bring them to repentance, and thereby prevent the necessity of punishing them in the eternal world: and when this end is not answered, he leaves them to themselves, to follow the imaginations of their own hearts, and to bring upon themselves an accumulated weight of wrath. But before he utterly abandons them, he sends them many solemn warnings, if that by any means he may prevail upon them to turn unto him. Extremely solemn is the reproof which he gave the Jews in the passage before us: he summons heaven and earth to hear his controversy, and to judge between him and his people: and then, in a way of affectionate expostulation, he threatens to cease from visiting them with parental chastisements, and to leave them to fill up the measure of their iniquities.

The words of our text, accommodated as they may be to our present circumstances, naturally lead us to set before you,

I. Our sinfulness—

The general description given of the Jews is equally suitable to us—

[We are a "nation" *extremely* and *universally* "sinful:" we are "laden with" every species of "iniquity"———We are "a seed of evil-doers:" all ranks and orders of men amongst us are depraved: the transgressions of individuals are indeed exceeding various; but sin of some kind is the delight of all, yea, it is the very element wherein we live———Nor are we merely corrupt, but "corrupters" of each other, laughing religion out of the world, and hardening one another in the commission of sin———]

Nor is the particular charge that is brought against them less applicable to us—

[It is lamentable to see what a general dereliction of religious principle obtains amongst us. Men do not indeed formally renounce Christianity; but "they forsake the Lord" as unworthy of their love or dependence; and, by an inward "apostacy" of the heart, "provoke the Holy One of Israel to anger." We might adduce a great variety of charges in confirmation of this; but we will notice only one, namely, our dependence on our fleets and armies, rather than on God. This is peculiarly provoking to the Deity, because it is a virtual denial of his providence, and an excluding of him from the government of the world[a]———]

But besides these things, there is a further charge to be brought against us, on account of,

II. Our incorrigibleness—

What improvement have we made of our late chastisements?

[Almost every kind of plague, as war, famine, and pestilence, has been lately sent us by God; and what are we profited by them? What national sin has been put away? I might almost ask, What unregenerate man has laid to heart his transgressions, and turned to the Lord? Does not sin reign amongst us as much as ever? Are we not like the incorrigible Jews[b]; or rather like Ahaz, who had a brand of infamy set upon him on this very account, that "he trespassed yet more in his distress[c]"?———]

What reason then have we to hope that our present troubles will be sanctified to our good?

[From past experience we have reason to fear, that we shall still remain a perverse and rebellious people, and only "revolt more and more." And, if God foresee that this will be the case, what can we expect, but that our present troubles should be sent, not for our correction, but for our utter destruction? What can we expect, but that he should execute upon us the vengeance he has threatened[d], and that "his wrath should now come upon us to the uttermost?"]

ADVICE—

1. Let us adore our God for the patience he has long exercised towards us[e]———

2. Let

[a] See Isai. xxii. 8—11. & Jer. xvii. 1. [b] Jer. v. 3—5.
[c] 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. [d] Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14.
[e] 2 Pet. iii. 15. Rom. ii. 4.

2. Let us tremble at his judgments now impending over us[f] — — —

3. Let us take encouragement from his present dealings with us, to turn unto him[g] — — —

[f] How soon may we find those threatenings fulfilled! Lev. xxvi. 27, 28, 36, 37.

[g] See Jer. xviii. 7, 8. & Judg. x. 15, 16.

CCCCLXXXIX.

THE SERVICE WHICH ALONE IS PLEASING TO GOD.

Isai. i. 10—17. *Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah: To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow.*

THOUGH tenderness and compassion are essential requisites for a Christian Minister, yet is fidelity also indispensable for a due discharge of his duties. If even a young Minister, like Timothy, was to "reprove and rebuke with all authority," it must become every servant of God, especially when dealing with hypocritical professors or hardened sinners, to "use great plainness of speech." It is true, a Minister in this day has not the same license as was given to the Prophets of old: we should not altogether think him justified in calling his audience "Rulers of Sodom, and people of Gomorrah:" but, when speaking in Jehovah's name, we must expostulate

late with all, even with the greatest of men, and declare to them, as the Prophet does, *the only way in which they can please and serve God.* With this view the Prophet used the language in our text; and in prosecution of the same end, we shall now declare,

I. The inadequacy of ritual observances—

The Jews were prone to rest in a compliance with the ceremonial law: and our text is, as it were by anticipation, an answer to their self-justifying remarks. They are supposed to have said, "How can you justly complain of us? We have served God with the most commendable zeal: we have offered him sacrifices—yea many—and of the best kind—and in the appointed manner—and with great reverence—and we have abounded in spiritual services also, no less than in carnal rites." But, in answer to all this, God indignantly replies, that, instead of being pleased with these services, he lothed and abhorred them; since, in the midst of all their boasted regard for him, they held fast their besetting sins[a]———

The Jewish ritual being abolished, it may be thought that this address is inapplicable to any of the present day: but it may justly be applied,

1. To self-righteous formalists—

[There is still, as Solomon expresses it, "a generation that is pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness." There are many whose whole religion consists in a performance of outward duties. Among the Papists this is an acknowledged fact: but it is also true of us Protestants, though to a less extent than it was a century ago. A regular attendance on all the public ordinances; a strict observance of the fasts and feasts of our Church, particularly of the time of Lent; a daily reading of the Psalms and Lessons for the day, and a recital of certain prayers; a rigid adherence to some particular forms, with an uncharitable censuring of all who are not equally strict in their attention to them; these, and other similar habits, form the ground of their hopes, and of a self-complacent confidence towards God. But, with all these apparently religious habits, their views, desires, and pursuits are altogether earthly: their friends and associates are men of this world: and vital godliness, together with all who possess it, is regarded by them with suspicion and dislike.

Now,

[a] ver. 10—15. The particular expressions throughout this whole passage are very emphatical, and worthy of attentive observation.

Now, whatever such persons may think of themselves, they are by no means in a state acceptable to God. Instead of looking with humility and contrition to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, they are ready to claim heaven as the reward of their good deeds: and instead of loving for the Redeemer's sake every member of his mystical body, they are among the foremost to despise and persecute his believing people. Whilst therefore they, in effect, say, "Stand off, I am holier than thou," they are, as God declares, "a smoke in his nose[b]."]

2. To many who make a profession of vital godliness—

[Many there are whose views of the Gospel are correct, but who are far from experiencing all that it is designed to teach them. Their zeal for the Gospel is great and ardent: they will go miles to hear it faithfully proclaimed: they will lose no opportunity of attending their favourite Minister: their very life seems to be spent as it were in hearing sermons. They will subscribe largely for building places of worship, especially for the use of those who are of their own sect and party. They are fond of prayer-meetings, and religious societies; and perhaps of shewing forth their own talents too in exposition or prayer. But, instead of using these things as means to a farther advancement in holiness, they regard them only as sources of present gratification, and as evidences of a pious mind; while at the same time they are destitute of all those tempers and dispositions, which are the chief ornament of religion, and the surest evidences of its existence in the soul. We read of Ezekiel's hearers, that they attended his ministrations with great delight, and listened to him as persons fond of music would to a great proficient in that science; and laid claim to superior piety on that account: but, "though they heard his words, they would not do them; for their heart went after their covetousness[c]." Now this is an exact description of the persons we refer to: they are conceited of their own knowledge and attainments, uncharitable towards those who differ from them, contemptuous towards those who are less instructed than themselves, regardless of the prejudices of others, and indifferent about the effect of their conduct upon them: they often make religion a cloke for idleness in their respective callings: they are headstrong and untractable, and insolent towards their superiors: they often cannot be depended on, even for truth in their words, or honesty in their dealings. What shall we say of such professors as these? Are they in a state pleasing unto God? No verily: they are an offence both to God and man; and their very

[b] Compare Isai. lxv. 5. with Luke xviii. 9, 14.
[c] Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. See also Isai. lviii. 2.

very best sacrifices are no better than "the cutting off of a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood[d]."]

Whilst our text thus forcibly declares the insufficiency of outward duties to please God, it sets forth in the strongest terms,

II. The necessity of moral attainments—

In relation to these, two things are required;

1. A renunciation of accustomed sins—

[Every person has some sins which more easily beset him, and which he is in a more especial manner called to mortify. We will not speak of gross open sins, as swearing and drunkenness, and such like: for no man who reflects at all, can suppose it possible to please God, whilst he is guilty of such flagrant abominations. But one man is naturally addicted to anger and passion; another to discontent and envy; another to lewdness and impurity; another to sloth and idleness; another to covetousness: one is filled with conceit and vanity; another with scepticism and infidelity; another with unbelieving fears: in a word, however the conduct of men may differ as to the immediate line which they pursue, they all, in their natural state, affect pleasure, or riches, or honour, and feel abundantly more satisfaction in the things of time and sense, than they do in the service of their God. Now every man is concerned to find out what his besetting sin is: for if we must all without exception become "new creatures in Christ Jesus," if "old things must pass away, and all things must become new," then is it necessary that we all should experience this change, and have an evidence of it in our own souls.

Earnestly would we press this thought upon the minds of those who have been externally blameless in their conduct: for it is common for persons of this description to be satisfied with a change in their *sentiments*, when they have never experienced any change in their *hearts and lives*. We all have, though certainly in different degrees, a need of that exhortation, "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings *from before mine eyes*." It is possible that very little change can be needed by us that is visible to man; but there is no natural man under heaven, who does not need to be greatly changed in the sight of God: and to him it is that we must approve ourselves, if ever we would be accepted in his sight.]

2. A performance of neglected duties—

[True piety will not consist with any allowed sin, whether of commission or of omission. But if we look back to our unrege-

[d] Isai. lxvi. 2, 3.

unregenerate state, how many duties are there, both to God and man, that we have neglected! By nature we are satisfied with doing acts of kindness when they come in our way: but to live for God, and our fellow-creatures, we know not: we do not search out occasions for the exercise of our benevolence, nor do we redeem our time in order to effect the greatest good within our reach. But, if we would please and honour God, we must imitate Him who "went about doing good:" our time, our talents, our influence must all be put forth for the relief of the needy, the comfort of the afflicted, the succouring of the oppressed, and for the spiritual, as well as temporal, benefit of all. We must also cultivate every kind of grace; not only putting off what is evil, but putting on what is good. In particular, "as the elect of God, we should put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us[e]." These are the things which God prefers to all the sacrifices that can be offered[f]; and without these, all that we can possess is in his estimation lighter than vanity itself[g].]

From hence then we may SEE,

1. The nature of true religion—

[That there are many who greatly mistake its nature, is evident from our text: but, when duly received into the heart, it neither insists on spiritual exercises to the neglect of moral virtues, nor on moral virtues to the neglect of communion with God: it has equal respect to both the tables of the Law. Let not any then attempt to put asunder what God has so inseparably joined. Let not any trust to their moral virtues on the one hand, nor to their spiritual exercises on the other; but let it be the endeavour of all to "have respect unto *all* the commandments," and to stand perfect and complete in *all* the will of God."]

2. The danger of self-deceit—

[We think it evident, that the persons here addressed as "Rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah," had by no means formed a just estimate of their own character. And we all see among those around us many who lie under a similar delusion: the conceited professor sees the blindness of the Pharisee, whilst the Pharisee notices with equal clearness his vain conceit. Professors too notice each other's failings, and often, with too much reason, stand in doubt of each other. But all are blind to their own failings: they make far too much allowance for their own evils; and sometimes glory in them as virtues: and so confident are many, of their own acceptance before God, that they will almost at the bar of *judgment*

[e] Col. iii. 8,12,13,14. [f] Ps. l. 8—14. Mic. vi. 7, 8. [g] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3,

judgment challenge heaven as their desert[b]. But, whilst they remain under the power of any allowed sin, "their religion is vain[i]," and their Judge will disclaim all knowledge of them[k]; yea, their unmortified lust, whatever it be, will plunge their souls into everlasting perdition[l]. We say not this to discourage the sincere, but to put all upon their guard, and especially to bring to self-examination those who are most confident that all is well with them. For it is certain that "the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath," and "fearfulness will surprise them" in the day of judgment[m].]

3. The excellency of the Gospel—

[The Gospel not only teaches us these things[n], but shews us where pardon for all our transgressions may be obtained, and how strength may be acquired for the discharge of all our duties. Even under the law these views were revealed; for, in the words following our text, God told his people, that their scarlet sins should, if mourned over and forsaken, "become white as snow:" and in other places he promised his Spirit to "write his laws upon their hearts," and to "cause them to keep his statutes[o]." But under the Gospel dispensation, the efficacy of the Redeemer's blood to "cleanse from sin," and of his grace to renew the heart, is declared in the strongest terms[p]. Hence then, when it is said, "Wash you, make you clean," there is no room to say, "I cannot;" for "the grace of Christ is sufficient" for all, and "we can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us[q]." Seek then to be washed in his blood, and to be sanctified by his Spirit, and then the smallest of your offerings, even a cup of cold water, shall be an acceptable sacrifice in the sight of God[r].]

[b] Matt. xxv. 44. [i] Jam. i. 26. [k] Matt. vii. 22, 23.
[l] Matt. v. 29, 30. [m] Isai. xxxiii. 14. [n] Tit. ii. 11, 12.
[o] Ezek. xxxvi. 27. [p] 1 John i. 7, 9. [q] Phil. iv. 13.
[r] 1 Pet. ii. 5.

CCCCXC.

EXHORTATION TO A HOLY WALK.

Isai. ii. 5. *O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.*

MANY prophecies there are which are not yet accomplished, especially among those which are to be fulfilled "in the last days." The last days were understood even by the Jews themselves as relating to the days of the Messiah; and they comprehend

prehend all the time from his first advent in the flesh to the period when his kingdom shall be fully established upon earth. Hence the prophecies relating to that period must have different degrees of accomplishment; being partly fulfilled in the first triumphs of the Gospel, but having a further and more entire accomplishment when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus it is that we are to understand the prophecy contained in the preceding context. "The mountain of the Lord's House," that is, the Gospel Church, was established on the top of the mountains in the Apostolic age, when it triumphed over heathen idolatry and Jewish superstition; and myriads of converts encouraged one another to serve and glorify their God: but we have not yet seen the time when "swords have been beaten into plough-shares, and spears into pruning-hooks, and nations have ceased to learn and practise the art of war:" That time however will come: and we should long, and labour to the utmost of our power, to hasten it forward. We should even now anticipate it; yea, we *will* anticipate it: "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

Let us walk in the light,

I. Of his truth—

His truth now shines in its meridian splendor—

["The darkness is indeed past; and the true light now shineth[a]:" "The day-star has arisen[b]:" "the day-spring from on high hath visited us[c]:" "the Sun of Righteousness[d]" shineth forth in his brightness: and the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer is now so plain, that "no wayfaring man, though a fool, can err therein[e]"———"On the face of Moses there was a veil, that they who received the law should not see its full import: but if the Gospel be hid, it is from those only whom the god of this world hath blinded;" since "we may all with open (that is, *unveiled*) face behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord[f]"———]

Let

[a] 1 John ii. 8. [b] 2 Pet. i. 19. [c] Luke i. 78, 79.
[d] Mal. iv. 2. [e] Isai. xxxv. 8. [f] 2 Cor. iii. 13—18.

Let us then walk in it—

[Having the light, we should "believe in the light, that we may be the children of light[g]." We should embrace with all thankfulness the way of salvation revealed in the Gospel. We should "*come to Christ*," as the appointed Saviour of a ruined world[h]: we should "*look to him*," as dying upon the cross for us[i]: we should "*build upon him*, as our only foundation[k];" and "*cleave unto him* with full purpose of heart[l];" and "determine to know none but him[m]," and to "glory in nothing but the cross of Christ[n]"——— "Arise then, and *be enlightened*, for the light is come; and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you[o]."]

Whilst confiding in God as reconciled to us by the blood of the cross, we should endeavour to walk in the light,

II. Of his countenance—

This is the privilege of a true Believer—

[So it is declared to be, by one who experienced it richly in his own soul[p]. God presents himself to us in the Gospel under the endearing relations of a Father and a Friend, to whom we may carry every want, every trial, every difficulty; and from whom we may expect a supply according to our need. He will be not only "*our God*," but "*a God unto us*[q]," putting forth all his wisdom, all his love, and all his power, to make us truly blessed. He will engage in this work "with his whole heart and with his whole soul[r];" so that it must be utterly our own fault if we be not as holy, and as happy, as our hearts can wish———]

Let us then enjoy our privilege—

[Let us "walk with God," as Enoch did; and "glory in him as the God of our salvation." See what holy joy David found in communion with him[s]——— and shall we who live under a so much nobler dispensation experience less? Shall not *we*, who have so much clearer views of Christ, "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified?" O let us "*delight ourselves in God*," and have even now, "in the secret of his presence" and the consolations of his Spirit, an earnest and a foretaste of our heavenly inheritance[t]———]

But we shall in vain hope to enjoy his presence, if we walk not also in the light,

III. Of

[g] John xii. 35, 36. [h] Matt. xi. 28. [i] Isai. xlv. 22.
[k] 1 Cor. iii. 11. [l] Acts xi. 23. [m] 1 Cor. ii. 2.
[n] Gal. vi. 14. [o] Isai. lx. 1. *The marginal reading.*
[p] Ps. lxxxix. 15. [q] 1 Chron. xvii. 24. [r] Jer. xxxii. 41.
[s] Ps. lxiii. 1—5. & cxlv. 1—12. & cl. [t] Ps. xxxi. 20. Eph. i. 13, 14.

III. Of his commandments—

These are given by him "as a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths"—

[Without them we should not "know how to walk and to please God;" but by them we are fully informed in all things that are needful for us to do[u]. They do not indeed descend to every particular circumstance in which we can be placed; but they afford principles which are universally applicable, and which are quite sufficient for our direction when duly applied. The duty of "doing to others as we would be done unto," is so comprehensive as to embrace every part of our social duty, whilst it is so simple that it may be comprehended and applied by every one who desires to please God.]

Let us then make these the one rule of our conduct—

[Let us not attempt to reduce them to the standard of the world, but endeavour rather to raise our conduct to the standard of God's revealed will. Let us treasure up in our minds the most exalted precepts, and "hide God's word in our hearts, that we may not sin against him:" for "then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect unto all God's commandments"———]

In ADDRESSING "the house of Jacob," we must speak to,

1. Those who are nominally so—

[It is but too true, that "all are not Israel, who are of Israel:" and those who are only of the house of Jacob by name and profession, may know it by their walk and conversation. Consider, I pray you, in what light you have walked: Is it not manifest, that the generality who call themselves Christians are influenced only by the things of time and sense; and that their principles and pursuits are altogether earthly? Know then, ye lovers of this present evil world, that, if God's word may be depended on, you are deluding yourselves to your eternal ruin[x]. You "sow the wind, and you shall reap the whirlwind[y]." When will you begin to see, that "one thing," and one thing only, "is needful?" When will you learn to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee?" That you should seek present, as well as eternal, happiness, we grant: but you should seek it where David did; "Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us; and that will put more gladness in

[u] Prov. vi. 23. [x] Isai. l. 11. [y] Hos. viii. 7.

in my heart than any increase of corn, wine, and oil can ever do[x]."]

2. Those who are really so—

[You have found that God in Christ is "a fountain of life; and in his light you have seen light[a]." You therefore are "children of the light and of the day." But if you are so highly distinguished in your character, think how distinguished you should also be in your conduct[b]. The eyes of all are upon you: they will look particularly to see whether religion is such a source of happiness, as you profess. O shew them that "you need neither the sun to lighten you by day, nor the moon by night, since the Lord has been a light unto you, and your God your glory[c]." Shew them that even in the greatest troubles you have a fountain of consolation to go unto; and that "when you walk in darkness, the Lord is a light unto you[d]." And, as it is eminently characteristic of Gospel times to encourage one another in the ways of God, see that you do so, "speaking one with another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts unto the Lord." Then, from enjoying God in his courts below, you shall be taken to serve him in his Temple above, where your largest desires shall be satisfied, and your utmost capacities be filled[e].]

[x] Ps. iv. 6, 7. [a] Ps. xxxvi. 9. [b] Eph. v. 8. 1 Thess. v. 5, 6.
[c] Isai. lx. 19. [d] Job xxix 3. Mic. vii. 8.
[e] Rev. xxi. 22, 23. Ps. xvi. 11.

CCCCXCI.

ISAIAH'S VISION OF CHRIST.

Isai. vi. 5—7. *Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.*

PREVIOUS to the full revelation of himself in the Gospel, God was pleased to communicate his mind and will to men by dreams and visions, which, since the completion of the Sacred Canon, are no longer to be expected. But we must not therefore imagine

imagine that the revelations so made are less interesting to us, than those which proceeded more immediately from the enlightening influence of the Holy Ghost. The same importance must be attached to every thing which God has spoken, so far at least as the instruction which is intended to be conveyed is itself important. For instance, the vision of Isaiah seems to have been a peculiar favour vouchsafed to him: but still it contains many instructive lessons for us: and in this two-fold view we will consider it,

I. As a peculiar favour vouchsafed to him—

That we may have a more distinct view of it, we shall notice in succession,

1. The vision given—

[The place where the Prophet was supposed to be, was the outer court of the Temple; from whence, the veil which separated it from the Sanctuary being drawn aside, he beheld JEHOVAH seated on his throne, and his train, like that of Eastern monarchs, filling the Temple. Had no additional light been cast on this vision in the New Testament, we should not have thought of inquiring more minutely about the glorious object whom he saw, and who is here so repeatedly designated by titles peculiar to the one supreme God: but we are authorized to declare, that the person whom he saw, was the Lord Jesus Christ, even our "Immanuel, God with us[a]."

Around the throne were "the Seraphims," the holy angels, like flames of fire[b], in a posture of devout adoration. Each of them had six wings; with two of which he covered his face, as unworthy to behold the Deity; and, with other two, his feet, as unworthy to serve him; whilst with the remaining two he flew with all possible activity to fulfil his will. In themselves they were perfect and spotless creatures; yet, conscious of being as nothing in the sight of a pure and holy God, they were filled with profoundest awe, and served him with reverential fear.

In their worship of him they celebrated, in alternate and responsive songs, *the holiness of his nature*, and *the wonders of his grace*. Whether, in the repetition of the word "holy," there be any reference, as some have thought, to the Three Persons of the Godhead, we undertake not to determine: but they evidently regarded the holiness of the Deity as that attribute, which constitutes the glory and perfection of all the rest: and

[a] John xii. 41. [b] Ps. civ. 4.

and indeed it is that attribute in which he is more especially glorious[c], and at the remembrance of which the whole universe should give thanks[d]. Together with this glorious subject they evidently combined the wonders of redeeming love. It is in that view alone that "the *earth*" can be said to be "full of his glory." In the whole creation indeed there is a marvellous display of wisdom and power; but in redemption alone are seen the mercy, and truth, and faithfulness of our God. And though the Seraphims are not interested in that work as we are, yet, as exhibiting the full radiance of all the Divine perfections in united splendor, they admire it, they sing of it, they glorify the Lord Jesus on account of it[e].

At the sound of their voices the doors of the Temple were shaken, and the House was filled with smoke. It is possible that this was designed to express the approbation of the Deity, and his delight in that work which was the subject of their praise[f]. But we rather suppose, that it was intended to intimate the future abolition of the Temple worship, when the time should have arrived for the complete establishment of the Christian dispensation[g].]

2. The fear excited—

[In all the manifestations of God to men, the sight of his Majesty has excited alarm and terror[h]. A measure of this feeling we behold in the Prophet on this occasion. But together with this, there was also a deep sense of humiliation and contrition. As Job, on a similar occasion, was led to exclaim, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes[i]," so the Prophet, viewing himself, and all around him, in the light of God's holiness, accounted himself a leper in the midst of a leprous world. Whatever he might have judged of himself before, he now was dumb; as indeed every human being must be in the presence of a holy God[k]; since "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags[l]." From the apprehension and terror we are freed by the Gospel: but the humiliation and self-abasement should rather increase in proportion to the more exalted privileges we enjoy[m].]

3. The consolation administered—

[Instantly did one of the Seraphims fly to him, to declare, that his iniquities were all blotted out as a morning cloud, through the atoning blood of Christ. This was emblematically represented to him by a coal taken from off the altar of burnt-

[c] Exod. xv. 11. [d] Ps. xxx. 4.

[e] Compare Ps. lxxii. 17—19. Where the *same person* is spoken of, and the *same subject* pursued.

[f] 2 Chron. v. 13, 14. & vi. 1. [g] Am. ix. 1. with Heb. xii. 27.

[h] Judg. xiii. 22. Dan. x. 6—8. Rev. i. 17. [i] Job xlii. 5, 6.

[k] Rom. iii. 19. [l] Isai. lxiv. 6. [m] Ezek. xvi. 63.

burnt-offering, and applied to his lips. Doubtless the performance of this office was a delightful service to the Seraph, who would willingly forego for a season the more immediate vision of the Deity himself, for the honour of executing his will as a Messenger of mercy to sinful man.]

But we hasten from this more restricted view of the subject, to consider it,

II. As an instructive lesson to us—

Whilst we acknowledge that such visions are not to be expected by us, we may contemplate this with great advantage to our souls. We may learn from it,

1. That a sight of Christ is the highest privilege we can enjoy—

[What is it that constitutes the felicity of heaven? What is it that is the great source of happiness to the Seraphim around the throne? It is a sight of Christ enthroned in his glory. Yet was that sight afforded to the Prophet in a vision; and afterwards to St. Paul, by an immediate admission to it in heaven. And is there no such vision to be enjoyed by us? To our bodily eyes indeed there is not; nor to our imaginations will any such view of him be presented: but to the eye of faith the Lord Jesus is clearly visible; and the eyes of every Believer may even now "behold the King in his beauty[n]." In the Gospel he is fully revealed to us: there he appears as "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person:" and we may "behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." We need not envy the Prophet himself: for we may have even brighter views of Jesus than he ever enjoyed. We are told that John was greater than all the Prophets; and yet that the "least in the kingdom of heaven," that is, under the Gospel dispensation, "is greater than he[o]." How did *he* excel all others? Others prophesied of Christ; but *he* pointed him out; "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!" And wherein do *we* excel him? He beheld Jesus when he came to accomplish our redemption; and *we* behold him after its accomplishment, seated on his throne of glory, and actually applying to millions of his people the full benefits of that redemption. Let those who embrace the Gospel know their high privilege. Let the poor especially rejoice and be glad. It is not to human learning or to strength of intellect that this discovery of Christ is made, but to faith: and if we search the Sacred Records with a believing eye, then will "God shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."]

2. That

[n] Isai. xxxiii. 17. [o] Luke vii. 26—28.

2. That the more lowly we are in our own eyes, the richer communications we shall receive from him—

[Behold how speedily the Angel was sent to comfort the mind of the dejected Prophet! This was a faithful representation of the care which Jesus takes of all his afflicted people, especially when humbled in the dust before him. "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, till he bring forth judgment unto victory." Though he is "The High and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, yet will he dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones[p]." Does not his word universally attest this blessed truth, that "whilst he who exalteth himself shall be abased, the man that humbleth himself shall be exalted?" Be not afraid then, ye who feel your own unworthiness: give not way to despondency: say not, "Woe is me! I am undone:" follow not the unbelieving example of Peter, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord[q]." But know that, if you feel yourselves lost, it was precisely such persons that he came to seek and save[r]; and that, "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound[s]:" and if, like Mary, you are enabled to go behind him, and wash his feet with your tears, he will ere long say to you, "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee." Indeed it is in this way that he is daily acting by the ministry of his word: he sends his servant to take his promises, and apply them to the hearts and consciences of his people[t], and thus to fill them with "a peace that passeth understanding," and "joy that is unspeakable and glorified."]

3. That a sense of his pardoning love should animate us to an unreserved surrender of ourselves to him—

[See the effect which was instantly produced on the Prophet's mind. God designed to send his messages of love and mercy to the Jews, notwithstanding he knew beforehand that they would prove ineffectual for their conversion. To carry such messages was a painful task: but yet, when God asked, "Who will go for us?" the Prophet hesitated not one moment to offer his services, saying, "Here am I; send me[u]." Thus should we also manifest our gratitude to God for all the mercies vouchsafed unto us through the Son of his love. We should not inquire whether the office be pleasant; or, whether it will advance our credit in the world? It should be sufficient for us to know what the will of the Lord is; and then we should

[p] Isai. lvii. 15. & lxvi. 2. [q] Luke v. 8. [r] Luke xix. 10.
[s] Rom. v. 20, 21. [t] 1 Thess. i. 5. [u] ver. 8.

should account it our honour to do, or suffer it. Especially does this observation apply to those who minister in holy things: if God say, Who will go for me, to carry my Gospel to the heathen? we should not stand to inquire, Whether the office be lucrative or not? or, Whether the climate to which we are to go, be more or less salubrious? No: we should stand forth and say, "Here am I; send me." O that we all felt this holy zeal, and that we did not so lamentably "confer with flesh and blood," when, if called to it, we should leave even the vision of God himself, to execute his will towards sinful man!

But, in whatever line of life we move, we should be actuated by the same spirit; and so feel the constraining influence of Christ's love, as to live no longer to ourselves, but altogether unto Him who died for us, and rose again[x].]

[x] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

CCCCXCII.

BLESSINGS IMPARTED BY THE GOSPEL.

Isai. ix. 2—4. *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.*

THE dispensations of God in this world are never so afflictive, but there are some alleviating and consolatory circumstances to cheer us under them. The judgments with which he threatened to punish his apostate people were very tremendous[a]: yet he comforted them in the mean time with prospects of the Messiah's advent. Whatever reference the words of my text may have to the deliverance of the Jews from Sennacherib's army, we are sure that they refer to Christ, and to the blessings that should issue from the ministration of his Gospel. St. Matthew quotes them in this view[b]; and the very words themselves are

[a] Ch. viii. 19—22. [b] Matt. iv. 12—16.

are far more suited to a spiritual subject than to any temporal occurrence[c].

We notice then in the text three rich blessings resulting from the Ministry of Christ, and of his servants in all ages; namely, *light, joy,* and *victory.* The first which the Christian receives, is,

I. Light—

Men are everywhere "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death"—

[This was the case with the Jews, notwithstanding they were God's professing people, and had continual access to the word and ordinances of God. And it is the case with us, notwithstanding we are called Christians, and have the word and sacraments administered amongst us. We are like persons immured in a dungeon, or bereft of sight: light is shining all around us, but we see it not: we are as much in darkness as if there were no light at all. The Scriptures uniformly represent us thus; and experience abundantly confirms their testimony. How ignorant are men of their own hearts; of God; of the way of acceptance with him; and indeed of the whole circle of Divine truth! Nor is this ignorance confined to the illiterate: it obtains as much among the great and learned, as among the poorest and meanest of mankind.]

But by the Gospel the eyes of their understanding are opened—

[All were not enlightened by the preaching of Christ and his Apostles; nor are *all* instructed now by the word they hear: but they whose eyes are opened, do attain by the Gospel a wonderful insight into "the truth as it is in Jesus:" they discover the depth of their own depravity: they behold "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ:" a thousand other things "which the natural man cannot receive," are open to their view: "they are brought out of darkness into marvellous light[d]:" "neither do they from thenceforth walk any more in darkness, because they have the light of life[e]."]

Together

[c] The first verse of the chapter is inexplicable, according to our version. Bp. Lowth translates it differently, and thereby makes the sense of the whole passage clear. "There shall not hereafter be darkness in the land which was distressed. He formerly debased the land of Zebulon and Naphthali, but in the latter time he hath made it glorious, even the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. [For] the people, &c." The meaning is, that as the northern part of Galilee had been particularly afflicted by the incursions of the Assyrians, so it should be particularly honoured by the ministry of Christ.

[d] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [e] John viii. 12.

Together with light, the Christian is filled with,

II. Joy—

That which in the text we read "Thou hast *not* increased the joy," is in the margin translated, "Thou hast increased *to it* the joy," namely, to the nation of saints that are multiplied. This seems to be the more proper rendering of the words, and to agree best with the context; for all who are illuminated with Divine truth, have,

1. A sacred joy—

[Whatever joy a carnal man partakes of, let him only be brought into the Divine presence, and it vanishes at once. To speak to him of God and heaven and hell, is to make him melancholy. But the Christian's joy is a holy sacred joy: "he joys before God." It was appointed under the Law that the people at the beginning and end of harvest should bring their first-fruits and their tithes to the Temple, and, feasting upon them with their friends, rejoice before God[f]. Thus the Christian brings his temporal comforts into the Divine presence, that he may enjoy God both in and with them. By religion, all his joys are greatly enhanced; nor does he ever enjoy his food or his friends or any blessing in life so much, as when he is led to God by them, and glorifies his God in them. But the most delightful seasons are those wherein he can go to his God in secret, and pour out his soul before him. One hour spent in communion with his Lord is more to him than a whole life of carnal joy: it is a feast of fat things; an antepast of heaven.]

2. An exalted joy—

[The Christian's joy is compared to that of a successful husbandman, and a victorious warrior. In every age, the in-gathering of the harvest has been an occasion of joy[g]: the seizing also of the spoil from a vanquished enemy has ever been considered as a ground of triumph. There is indeed on both these occasions too much of what is merely carnal: still however the spirits of the people are raised far beyond their usual pitch. In this respect the Christian's joy resembles theirs. When he begins to see the fruit of his painful labours and his dubious conflicts, he cannot but rejoice that he has not laboured in vain, or fought in vain. Yes, his soul is joyful in his God, and "he rejoices with a joy that is unspeakable and glorified."]

To

[f] Deut. xvi. 9—15. [g] Isai. xvi. 9, 10.

To this the Gospel contributes, by crowning its converts with,

III. Victory—

As natural men are blind, so are they also under sore bondage—

[The Egyptian or Babylonish yoke was light in comparison of that which Satan has imposed on all the human race. He holds them fast in his chains, and "leads them captive at his will"———]

But through the Gospel they are effectually delivered from it—

[When the Jewish nation was oppressed by the Midianites, God raised up Gideon to effect its deliverance. But how was the deliverance wrought? by arms? No: God would not suffer him to employ the army he had raised, but first released all of them except ten thousand, and then dismissed all of those except three hundred. And how were those three hundred armed? with sword and spear? No: but with earthen pitchers, and lamps, and trumpets: and with this little army so accoutred, he put to flight the whole host of Midian: they brake their pitchers, held forth their lamps, and blew their trumpets, and the enemies were put to flight[h]. Thus, precisely thus, does the Christian triumph over his enemies: unable to accomplish any thing by his own arm, he, by the mere light and sound of the Gospel, vanquishes his foes. When indeed the route commences, he summons all his powers to destroy them; nor ceases from the pursuit, till he has effectually subdued them all. Behold a man who was lately enslaved by the world, the flesh, and the devil; see him at once throw off the yoke; behold him trampling on the world, crucifying the flesh, and bruising Satan under his feet! Is this a dream? No; it is a reality, that may be seen now as much as it was on the day of Pentecost, or on the day that the blood-thirsty Saul became a preacher of the faith he had once destroyed. "Such is the heritage of the servants of the Lord:" they all are conquerors, and "more than conquerors, through Him that loved them."]

INFER,

1. How strangely do men misconceive of the nature and operation of the Gospel!

[That which Christ and his Apostles preached, is deemed fanaticism, and is supposed to lead to melancholy and licentiousness. But how opposite is this sentiment to that which is contained in the text! Only let the Gospel be searched into with

[h] Judg. vii.

with candour and diligence, and we will venture to affirm that it shall approve itself as *light*, and become a source of *joy*, and lead to certain *victory*. Whatever remains of darkness, grief, or bondage, shall be gradually banished, and the felicity of heaven be enjoyed, in proportion as the soul is subjected to the dominion of Christ.]

2. How much do the saints of God live below their privileges!

[If we look at the first converts, we shall be ready to think that they were of a different species from us; so far are we below them in spiritual attainments. But is not the Gospel the same as it was in their day? Does it not require as much of us as it did of them? And will it not operate as powerfully on our hearts as it did on theirs? O let us not be satisfied with such indistinct views of the mysteries of God: let us not be contented with such scanty measures of joy and triumph: let us not think it enough to gain some small advantages over our spiritual enemies: let us look for greater things, and expect more signal displays of the Divine power and goodness! We are not straitened in God, but in ourselves: let us only be strong in faith; and "according to our faith it shall be unto us."]

CCCCXCIII.

PRIDE AND DOWNFALL OF THE ASSYRIAN MONARCH.

Isai. x. 12—17. *It shall come to pass, that, when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks: for he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down their inhabitants like a valiant man: and my hand hath found, as a nest, the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or, shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood. Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning, like the burning of a fire: and the Light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day.*

THE

THE doctrine of an all-disposing Providence is most consolatory to the mind of man. If every thing were left to chance, or were at the disposal of mortal men, we should have nothing to cheer us in adversity, or to moderate our overweening conceit in prosperity. But the thought, that all things are directed by an all-wise Being, who "does according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth," and "whose counsel," whatever the designs of men may be, "shall surely stand," preserves our minds composed and equable, in every situation, and in every condition. The situation of Jerusalem at the time when the Prophet wrote this was very afflictive: but by God's command he addressed them thus, in a few verses following our text: "O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt (at the Red Sea): for yet a very little while, and (as in the case of Pharaoh and his host) the indignation shall cease, and mine anger, in their destruction[a]." To the same effect does he speak also in the text itself; which we shall consider,

I. As fulfilled in Sennacherib—

Sennacherib was a proud and haughty monarch—

[The Assyrian empire was the most powerful at that time existing in the world: and Sennacherib was dignified with the title of, THE GREAT KING[b]. He himself too conceived that he was omnipotent, a rival of Jehovah, or rather, his superior[c].

Strange it is that mortal man should entertain such wild conceits: but such is frequently the effect of power: it altogether intoxicates us worms of the earth, and makes us forget that we are men[d].]

But God brought him down in a most awful manner—

[In one single night was his power broken by the sword of a destroying Angel, who slew 185,000 of his troops: and, not very long after, was he himself assassinated by two of his sons,

[a] ver. 24, 25. [b] 2 Kin. xviii. 19, 28.
[c] ib. ver. 33—35. with Isai. xiv. 13, 14.
[d] Ezek. xxviii. 2. & 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4.

sons, whilst worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god[e]. And thus it is that God has often humbled his proud blaspheming creatures[f]: yea, and more such instances of vengeance yet remain to be accomplished[g].]

This subject, so interesting of itself, is yet far more interesting,

II. As illustrated at this time[h]—

The resemblance between Sennacherib, and that powerful enemy with whom we have been contending now so many years, is very striking. We will point it out in a few particulars:

1. His unconscious agency—

[The great object of Sennacherib's ambition was, to subdue as many nations as he could, and bring them under subjection to himself. This was his object in warring against Judah. But God had another object in view. God raised him up to punish his offending people the Jews, and thereby to bring them to repentance. No such thought as this entered into the mind of Sennacherib. He went on with a view to his own aggrandisement: but God made use of him, as "the rod of his anger, and the staff of his indignation[i]."

Thus it has been with him who has for so long a period desolated every part of Europe. He has been instigated only by his own ambition, and a desire after universal empire: but God has been using him to punish the nations, who, though "naming the name of Christ, had scarcely any thing of Christianity except the name!" As God's instrument, he has effected a very great change in Europe: he has given a deadly blow to Popery, and has liberated the minds of men from those shackles with which they were held in a worse than Egyptian bondage. He has also, though quite unintentionally on his part, rooted out those principles of infidelity towards God, and of insubordination towards man, which were the means of placing him on his high eminence, and which he himself laboured as much as any one to disseminate. Nay more, by the very miseries which he has inflicted on the human race, he has occasioned a spirit of humiliation and of piety, which, unless at the Reformation and in the Apostolic age, never before obtained in Europe to the extent it now does. True it is, "he never meant these things, nor did they ever enter into his mind;" but still he has been an instrument in God's hand of effecting them.]

2. His great success—

[Nothing

[e] 2 Kin. xix. 35—37. [f] Ezek. xxviii. 3—10. [g] 2 Thess. ii. 8.
[h] Thanksgiving-day, Jan. 13, 1814. [i] ver. 5—7.

[Nothing could stand before Sennacherib[k]: and till lately, nothing has been able to withstand this proud Oppressor, whom we are comparing with him. Nation after nation has he subjugated; so that what Sennacherib said, may justly be said by him also, "Are not my princes altogether kings[l]?" Whilst he raised his Generals to the rank of kings, he made the old established kings his vassals. And truly one part of Sennacherib's commission he executed to perfection: if he had believed himself "*charged* by God, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread men down like mire in the streets[m]," he could not have fulfilled his mission with more fidelity, or with less remorse. He truly regarded the wealth of all the countries which he invaded, as "eggs found in a nest;" and he transported to his own capital every thing that was valuable, that the seat of his empire might become the centre of all that was great and glorious in the world. Yea, not content with acting thus towards the nations that opposed him, he exercised the same rapacity towards neutral and unoffending states[n]; and, whilst he was "gathering all the earth, there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped[o]," or dared even to remonstrate with him, and much less to oppose by force his tyrannical proceedings. In a word, he "removed the bounds of nations," apportioning them according to his own pleasure, and "robbed their treasures[p]," compelling all of them to augment and support his armies; and, with the exception of our favoured land, he exercised in every country a most despotic sway; and, if he could but have placed any bounds to his tyranny, and been content with consolidating instead of extending his dominions, he would have been the uncontrolled Governor of Europe at this hour.]

3. His Atheistic pride—

[The Assyrian monarch took to himself all the glory of his conquests: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent[q]." And how astonishingly striking is the resemblance between our great enemy and him in this particular! His official reports have been one continued boast from beginning to end. Never once has God been acknowledged by him as the disposer of the different events. We wonder not that a heathen should vaunt himself in this manner: but that a man professing himself a *Christian* should do it, and that too in the face of the whole *Christian* world, only shews to what a height his pride and impiety have risen. Well is the folly, as well as the impiety, of such conduct exposed in our text: it is, in fact, "the axe boasting itself

[k] ver. 9—11. [l] ver. 8. [m] ver. 6.
[n] The Hanse Towns especially. [o] ver. 14. [p] ver. 13. [q] ib.

itself against him that heweth with it; and the saw magnifying itself against him that shaketh it: it is the rod shaking itself against him that lifts it up, and the staff lifting itself up against its Master[r]." Presumptuous man! "Know that the Lord is greater than all gods; and that whereinsoever they deal proudly, he is, and will be, above them[s]."]

4. His sudden fall—

[In one single night was Sennacherib overthrown. So completely was that prediction verified, "The Light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day." And taking the day for a prophetic day, it has been almost as literally accomplished in our great Adversary. It was very little more than a year, between the time when he was in the plenitude of his power, and the time when he was reduced to his present state of weakness and degradation. There is a remarkable correspondence too in the very terms in which the destruction of the Assyrian monarch was foretold, and the means by which the destruction of the modern Sennacherib was effected. "God himself was for a fire and a flame," to burn him out of that city, where he had hoped to rest his army during the winter season. God put it into the heart of the people themselves to reduce their own houses to ashes, rather than to let them prove an asylum to their barbarous invader. This it was that necessitated him to measure back his steps "*by the way he had come*[t];" and this retreat was attended with the loss of all his army. Another desperate effort has he made to retrieve his fortunes; but that also was defeated in one single battle; which has left him more naked and destitute than Sennacherib himself; his own more immediate territory, which he had proudly deemed inviolable, being now invaded on every side, and his regal power being probably near the close of its existence. We pretend not ourselves to prophesy: but the time is probably very near at hand, when Ezekiel's description of the *character* and *end* of the Tyrian monarch will be accomplished in him in all its parts: "Will he then say before him that slayeth him, I am God? No: he will be a man, and not God, in the hand of him that slayeth him[u]."]

Our text is yet further worthy of attention,

III. As speaking to men in all ages—

Divested of all those particular circumstances which give it a more than ordinary interest at this time,

[r] ver. 15. [s] Exod. xviii. 11. [t] 2 Kin. xviii. 28, 33.
[u] Ezek. xxviii. 3—10.

time, it suggests many lessons of great, and general, and perpetual utility. It teaches us,

1. To receive afflictions as from the hand of God—

[The Jews probably ascribed their troubles to the insatiable ambition of the Assyrian monarch; as we also have traced ours to the Ruler of France. But God has told us, that, in the triumphs of Sennacherib, he himself was "performing a gracious work upon Mount Zion, and on Jerusalem:" and we know that Nebuchadnezzar also, and Cyrus, in their victories, were nothing more than "God's sword" and "battle-axe[x]." In this light then we should view all our *public* calamities. By whomsoever they may be occasioned, they come from God himself, and are sent by him for our good. As the Jews were sent by him into captivity in Babylon "for their good[y]," so are our severest losses and defeats intended to humble us, and to bring us to the footstool of our God. The same may be said also of our *personal* afflictions. When the Chaldeans and Sabeans plundered all the property of Job, and the elements conspired to augment and complete his misery, Job saw in every part of his trials the hand of God: "The *Lord* gave, and the *Lord* hath taken away: blessed be the name of the *Lord*[z]." And afterwards he prayed, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me[a]." This is precisely what the text teaches us also to do in every affliction. We should receive it as from God; and, having done so, we should "hear the rod, and him that appointed it." Were we but attentive to God's voice in afflictive dispensations, we should say to the instruments of our trouble, as Joseph did to his Brethren, "It was not you that sent me hither, but God:" and, instead of quarrelling with second causes, we should kiss the hand that smote us, and say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him."]

2. To acknowledge God in our successes—

[Certainly the interposition of God in the destruction of Sennacherib could admit of no doubt: it was as clear as that of Pharaoh, who was brought into the Red Sea for that very purpose[b]. And scarcely less visible was his agency in the destruction of our great adversary. God allured him into the heart of the Russian Empire, and inclined him to continue there, till his retreat was become impracticable: and to a similar infatuation did he give up this man, who, instead of retreating with his forces entire to the confines of his own kingdom, where he might, humanly speaking, have defied all the

[x] Jer. xxv. 9. Isai. xli. 25. & xlv. 1. with Jer. li. 20.
[y] Jer. xxiv. 5. [z] Job i. 13—21. [a] Job x. 2.
[b] ver. 24. with Exod. xiv. 17.

the efforts of the Allies, he madly retained an untenable position till he was reduced to the necessity of risking all upon a single battle. In these errors of his we see him given up to judicial blindness in order to his destruction, precisely as the enemies of Zion were in the days of old: "Many nations," says the prophet Micah, "are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But *they know not the thoughts of the Lord*, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall GATHER THEM AS SHEAVES INTO THE FLOOR. *Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion!*[c]" Indeed, notwithstanding the backwardness of men to "consider the operation of God's hands," there is scarcely a thoughtful person to be found, who does not see it, and acknowledge in the present instance, that HE *gathered them together* in both those places *as sheaves into the floor.*

But we must not think that God interposes only in great concerns, such as the fate of empires: he equally interests himself in all the events that are daily and hourly occurring: and from him does our success flow, even in the trivial matters. Have we succeeded in business? It is "he that has given us power to get wealth[d]." Have our agricultural labours been followed with an abundant increase? Not the abundance only, but the skill we exercised, was altogether from "God, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working[e]." Have we prospered in our spiritual course, and gained the victory over our spiritual adversaries? We must say with Paul, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God[f]:" "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ[g]!" Whatever evil we escape, or whatever good we enjoy, God must be regarded as the true, the only source of all. "In him are all our fresh springs[h];" and "of him is our fruit found[i]:" and all the glory must be his alone[k].]

3. To look to the final issue of every thing—

[Who that saw the issue of Sennacherib's invasion, would not prefer the salutary trials of Jerusalem before the short-lived triumphs of the proud Assyrian? and who that considers aright, does not now congratulate the yet bleeding countries of Europe, especially those who have derived spiritual benefit from their afflictions, and look with pity on the fallen Oppressor, laden as he must be with an intolerable load of conscious guilt, and the curses and execrations of half the human race? We may have been stumbled for awhile, just as David was, at the sight of prosperous wickedness; but

[c] Mic. iv. 11—13. [d] Deut. viii. 17, 18. [e] Isai. xxviii. 23—29.
[f] 2 Cor. v. 5. [g] 1 Cor. xv. 57. & 2 Cor. ii. 14.
[h] Ps. lxxxvii. 7. [i] Hos. xiv. 8. [k] Isai. xlv. 5—7.

but if with him we enter into the sanctuary, and contemplate the end of these men, or if we look at their end as exemplified in our fallen adversary, we shall know how to judge of such mysterious dispensations[1]. In like manner we may learn how to judge of every thing, whether prosperous or adverse, in our own affairs. Let us look to the final issue. What will prosperity benefit us, if it draws us from God, and leads us, like the rich fool, to fix our happiness on things below? On the other hand, what reason can we have to complain of afflictions, if they be sanctified to our spiritual and eternal good? Has the stone reason to complain that it receives many strokes, when it is thereby fitted for a conspicuous place in the Temple of the Lord? or the vine, even granting it to be fruitful, that it is "pruned, when it is made thereby to bring forth more fruit?" or the vessel, that it is put into the furnace, when it is thereby rendered meet for the Master's use? Be not then so much concerned to get rid of present trials, as to have them made subservient to the good of your souls. Only beg of God, that "*his whole work may be performed upon you*;" and leave the means of accomplishing that work to Him, who ordereth every thing with unerring wisdom and unbounded love. You will then see, ere long, that "he hath abounded towards you with all wisdom and prudence;" and in all future trials you will say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."]

[1] Ps. lxxiii. 3—14, 16—20.

CCCCXCIV.

THE WELLS OF SALVATION.

Isai. xii. 3. *With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*

WE wonder not that the Scriptures are read with so little interest by the generality: for, till persons know somewhat of their lost estate, and of the way of salvation provided for them, the Bible is to them a sealed book. But let them once experience a taste of the Redeemer's love, and instantly they will find in the Inspired Volume mines of wealth. Such a storehouse is that blessed book to the godly in this day: and such will it be to the Jewish Church, when once they shall be converted to the faith of Christ. "*In that day* they will say, O Lord, I will praise

praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." (Such will be the reflections at the time of their first discoveries of God's mercy to them in Christ Jesus. Then they will advance farther to express their full confidence in God.) "Behold, God is my salvation! I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." (Then will they be fully prepared to derive the richest benefit from the Scriptures: and) "*therefore* shall they draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation."

That we may form a just estimate of their privilege, let us consider,

I. The character by which the Scriptures are here designated—

The expression, "wells of salvation," is supposed by many to be spoken of Christ: and doubtless it may be very fitly applied to him. But I rather understand it of the Scriptures, from whence, as from an inexhaustible fountain, all true comfort flows. They eminently deserve that name,

1. As containing in themselves all the blessings of salvation—

[The whole of salvation as planned in the Divine counsels from all eternity, as executed for us by the Lord Jesus Christ in his incarnate state, as still carrying on by him at the right hand of his Father, and as offered through him to every child of man, is there fully contained. "This mystery of Godliness was indeed kept secret since the world began; but now it is made manifest; and by the Scriptures of the Prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, is made known to all nations for the obedience of faith*."

Now let any one contemplate this mystery, and endeavour to explore the *wisdom*, the *love*, the *mercy*, and the *grace* contained in it: how surpassing all finite comprehension will they be found! Verily, the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of this mystery, and of the wonders contained in it, are utterly unsearchable; and the blessings flowing from it are a plenteous and perennial spring, for the refreshment of all on earth, and of all in heaven.]

2. As revealing them for our use—

[In

* Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

[In the whole world besides, there is not to be found one drop of water to satisfy a thirsty soul. Where can one look that is oppressed with a sense of guilt? Where, one who is mourning over the corruptions of his nature? Go to those who have not the Scriptures: go to even the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome; and see how vain were all their expedients for pacifying a guilty soul, or purifying a polluted soul. But in the Scriptures we find all that a sinner can desire; an atonement, sufficient for the sins of the whole world; and an Almighty Agent ready to dwell in the heart of all who seek him, and engaged to transform into the Divine image all who commit their souls to him. In them are promises suited to every condition incident to our fallen nature; as suited to refresh the soul, as water is to allay our thirst. Conceive of every want with which a sinner can be oppressed, and the appropriate relief will there be found.]

3. As actually imparting them to our souls—

[As a spring pours forth its waters, so do the Scriptures impart life, and peace, and strength to all who go to them as God's appointed channel of communication to their souls. They have within themselves a life-giving virtue[b]; so that, when brought home and applied by the Spirit of God, they quicken the dead, and give a vital energy to all our powers. They are able, not only to "make men wise unto salvation," but to impart salvation itself; being "like fire" to consume dross[c], and "a hammer to break the rock in pieces[d]," and "a two-edged sword to pierce the very inmost soul[e]," and "a weapon to destroy every enemy[f]." They have a power to enlighten the darkest mind[g], and to sanctify all on whom they operate aright[h]; and so to sanctify them, as to prepare them for the perfect fruition of their God[i].]

Think then of,

II. The blessedness of having access to them—

Truly we should never contemplate them but with joy, on account of,

1. The freeness with which we may approach them—

[There is no prohibition to any creature under heaven. About wells that have been dug for a supply of common water, there have been the fiercest contentions[k]: but these are public property, and equally accessible to all: none have to "pay for this water," as Israel had[l]: it is to be had "without money and

[b] John iv. 10.
[c] Jer. xxiii. 29.
[d] ib.
[e] Heb. iv. 12.
[f] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.
[g] Ps. xix. 7, 8.
[h] John xv. 3. & xvii. 19.
[i] Eph. v. 26, 27.
[k] Gen. xxvi. 18—21.
[l] Numb. xx. 19.

and without price[m]." True indeed it is that these are many, Protestants as well as Papists, who would bar our access to them: but God has given to all an equal right to come to them: for his invitation is, "Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely[n]."]

2. The ease with which we may draw from them—

[There are those who think it in vain for the poor to come to them, seeing that "the wells are deep, and they have nothing to draw with[o]." But, be it known, that however valuable learning may be for the attaining a *critical* acquaintance with the holy Scriptures, it is not at all necessary for a *spiritual* perception of their truths. It is faith, and not learning, that is wanting for *that* end. All the learning in the universe will not impart to us a spiritual discernment, any more than it will furnish us with any corporeal organs. It is faith alone that will avail us here. That discerns the things which are not visible to mortal eyes; and will go to the very bottom of these wells, and draw from thence the most refreshing consolations.]

3. The abundance that we may receive out of them—

[When the rock was struck by Moses, the waters gushed out in such abundance, that the whole camp of Israel, with all their cattle, could drink thereof. And, if all the sinners in the universe will go to these wells, they shall find no lack for the supply of their most enlarged necessities. Our Lord says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water[p]." Indeed, the more intense and ardent your thirst is, the more abundant shall be the blessings which you shall derive from them———]

4. The perfect satisfaction that we may find in them—

["Whoever drinks of other waters will thirst again: but whoever drinks of these wells, will never thirst: for the water which he has received will be in him as a well of water springing up into everlasting life[q]." I may appeal to all, whether the most copious draughts of carnal pleasure ever satisfied? Solomon, who drank as deep of it as a human being could do, pronounced it all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. "The eye was never yet satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing." But he who has obtained the knowledge of Christ, and drunk deep of the promises of the Gospel, has no longer any

[m] Isai. lv. 1. [n] Rev. xxii. 17. [o] John iv. 11.
[p] John vii. 37, 38. [q] John iv. 13, 14. Isai. xlix. 9, 10.

any relish for earthly vanities, nor any desire after them. Give him all the world, and he feels empty: give him the presence of God, and he desires no more.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are going to broken cisterns—

[What is the creature but "a broken cistern that can hold no water?"———And will you for this forsake "the fountain of living waters[r]?" Let me prevail on every one of you to go to God as your reconciled God in Christ Jesus, and to say with David, "All my fresh springs are in thee[s]."]

2. Those who are drinking from "the fountain of life[t]"—

[Say whether you have not "a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not?" Say whether the fountains do not richly supply you; and whether, even on the highest places, which, according to human apprehension, are inaccessible to rivers, the rivers do not follow you[u]? Yes, till you arrive at heaven itself, the streams shall never fail; and even there shall they run beside you for your comfort to eternal ages[x].]

[r] Jer. ii. 13. [s] Ps. lxxxvii. 7. [t] Ps. xxxvi. 9.
[u] Isai. xli. 17,18. [x] Rev. vii. 17.

CCCCXCV.

THE BELIEVER'S SONG.

Isai. xii. 3—6. *With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.*

THE restoration of the Jews, and their union with the Gentiles under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is foretold so plainly by the Inspired Writers, that we have no doubt at all but that it shall be accomplished in due season. The prediction contained in the foregoing chapter is peculiarly full and express. It relates not to Judah only, but to the ten tribes also; who shall be brought from Assyria, as the other two tribes once were from Babylon. The ensign to which they will flock, is that of the Son of Jesse, the Lord Jesus[*]: and the joy excited in their breasts will

[*] Ch. xi. 10,12.

will be like that which their fathers felt at their deliverance from Egypt, when they beheld all their enemies dead upon the sea shore.

The chapter before us is a song, which shall be sung on that occasion by the whole assembly of the Lord's people: and in it we see,

I. Their high privilege—

The learned Prelate to whom the world are so much indebted for his translation of the prophecies of Isaiah, renders the first verse of our text, not, "*Therefore* ye shall draw," but, "*When* ye shall draw;" which all will do in the day to which our text refers. But,

There are wells of salvation now open unto us—

[Often is our blessed Lord and Saviour represented under the image of a well or fountain[b]———And he himself, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, assumed, as it were, that title[c]. Moreover, the very passage from whence our text is taken was applied by him to himself.

At the feast of Tabernacles a custom obtained, which will fully illustrate our text. The people on the last day of that feast used to go in procession, and draw water from the pool of Siloam, and then to mix it with wine, and pour it on the sacrifices. There was no direction for this in the law of Moses; but the custom was instituted by the Jews themselves, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, with a reference to this prophecy which we are now considering. On the day of this ceremony, Jesus stood in the place where the procession was passing, and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto ME, and drink[d]:" as if he had said, 'I am the person spoken of by the Prophet, and the person whom ye profess to expect: and, if you will believe in me, I will give you my holy Spirit in such abundance, as shall be effectual for your present peace, and your everlasting salvation.' Indeed, his person, (as God-man,) his work (even his whole obedience unto death,) his offices, (as our Great High Priest that makes atonement for us, our King that rules over us and in us, and our Prophet that guides us into all truth,) may all be considered as so many wells from whence our salvation flows———Yea, his word also, and ordinances, may be considered in the same light, because from them we draw all the instruction, the grace, the consolation, that we stand in need of.]

From

[b] Ps. xxxvi. 9. Zech. xiii. 1. Another view of the subject is here taken, different from that in the preceding discourse. As the precise import of the "wells" is not determined in Scripture, it may be taken either way. [c] John iv. 6—14. [d] John vii. 37—40.

From these we may draw water with joy—

[Truly there is nothing which can conduce to our salvation, which is not to be found in Christ. The water that he will give us will cleanse us at once from all the guilt and defilement of sin: it will purify our very nature, so that "we shall be renewed after the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness." From him *all* may draw. Not a sinner in the universe is so unworthy, but that he may come to Christ, and by faith receive from him whatsoever he stands in need of. The invitation is given to "all who thirst:" no qualification is required on their part, except an earnest desire, and a humble faith: they may take as much as they can wish, freely, "without money and without price[e]." They are not in the situation of Hagar, who when she relieved her son's thirst from the small vessel that she had taken, grudged, as it were, every drop that was expended, because she knew not where to obtain enough to satisfy his returning wants, which would speedily return: they may come and draw "with joy," knowing that the supply is inexhaustible, and perfectly commensurate with all their wants. The very first taste of this water shall so invigorate their souls, that they shall feel like a giant refreshed with wine: and every successive draught shall "strengthen them with might in their inner man," and "fill them, as it were, with all the fulness of God[f]."]

But the true virtue of this fountain will be best seen in,

II. Their heavenly employment—

There is a remarkable difference between the two parts of this divine song: in that which precedes our text, the expressions relate entirely to the case of the individual himself; but, in the text, the individual rises to the concerns of others, and becomes, as it were, a preacher to all around him. Hence then we see the employment of all true Christians:

1. They glorify God themselves—

[The first thought of their hearts is that of *humble gratitude* for the unspeakable mercy of reconciliation with God. They look back, and see the innumerable offences whereby they have excited the displeasure of Almighty God, and how justly they might have been made monuments of his wrathful indignation. They contemplate the state of those who have died in their sins, and wonder that they themselves are not now taking their portion with them. They then contrast the happy

[e] Isai. lv. 1. [f] Eph. iii. 19.

happy state to which they themselves are brought through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus: they behold God as reconciled to them through the blood of his cross; and with inexpressible comfort are enabled to address him by the endearing name of Father. In the view of these things they exclaim with profoundest adoration, "O Lord, I will praise thee; for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me."

From thence they proceed to glory in God with *unshaken* affiance: for, What can *they* want, who have God himself for their salvation? "If God be for them, who can be against them?" "JEHOVAH himself is their strength," "dwelling in them," "working in them mightily," and "enabling them always to triumph in Christ." Shall he not then be "their *Song*?" Yes; "they know in whom they have believed:" they know his power, and love; his faithfulness and truth: and therefore though on the field of battle, they assure themselves of victory, and anticipate with joy unspeakable the final issue of their conflicts. Not that they are blind to the difficulties which they have to encounter, or ignorant of the enemies they have to contend with: but they see Jehovah himself engaged for them by covenant and by oath; and in the confidence that he will never leave them nor forsake them, they say, "I will trust and not be afraid;" "being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ[s]."]

They stir up others to glorify him also—

[Having a light kindled in their souls, they "do not put it under a bushel, but set it on a candlestick," that others may see their light. They burn with zeal for God, and would gladly extend the knowledge of him to the ends of the earth. They are filled with love also to their fellow-creatures; and would not have one to perish, if by any means they might be instrumental to the salvation of his soul. Towards the household of faith in particular they feel an ardent desire to promote their advancement in all that is "lovely and of good report." Hence they exhort one another to abound in praise and thanksgiving to their common Lord and Saviour: they urge one another to "call upon him," to "declare his name," to make known his love, to commend him to the whole world. They would have all to "sing unto Him" "with thanksgiving and the voice of melody." They cannot endure the thought that "an inhabitant of Zion" should be silent; they would have every Believer to "cry out and shout," so that, were it possible, the whole universe might hear.

They remind each other of the great things which the Saviour

[s] Phil. i. 6.

Saviour has done, and is yet doing, for his Church and people. They delight to speak of "the excellent things" which he has done, in assuming our nature, and dying in our stead, and working out for us a free and full salvation: and they rejoice no less to contemplate, how "great the Holy One of Israel is in the midst of them," and how certainly he will put down all their enemies, and "bruise Satan himself under their feet."

These are the things which are the daily subject of their thoughts, their conversation, and their praise: and in proportion as any are endued with his grace, they will infallibly abound in these holy exercises.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. How great a matter is the salvation of the soul—

[Many think of it as a matter of course——— but not so the person who has been taught of God: *he* sees that it is a miracle of mercy that any Child of man is saved. That he himself has obtained mercy, is to the true Christian a source of wonder and amazement. That God should ever look upon *him*, and pardon *him*, and save *him!* he knows not how to express his sense of such amazing love. He would have "the rocks and hills to break forth into singing, and all the trees of the wood to clap their hands with joy." And if we have never thus been penetrated with a sense of God's unbounded love, we are yet strangers to the salvation he has wrought out for us.]

2. How precious is Christ to all who know him—

[Mere nominal Christians can think and speak of him without emotion; but not so the persons who "have tasted of his grace:" they can never find words whereby to express their love and gratitude to their adorable Benefactor. They are ashamed that they can ever think or speak of any thing else. "To them *indeed* he is precious;" and, if they could have their desire, they would love him, and serve him, and glorify him, on earth, even as the glorified saints are doing it in heaven. Is this your experience, my beloved Brethren? Does the whole universe appear to you but "as a broken cistern," and is Christ the only fountain from whence you desire to draw? O that you may be able more and more to say, "All my fresh springs are in thee[h]!"]

3. How happy is the Christian's state—

[Doubtless there is a great diversity in men's attainments: there are babes, and young men, and fathers in the family of Christ. But in this there is a resemblance among them all: they are full of gratitude to their incarnate God: and all their

[h] Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

their hope is in his power and grace. They are also active in diffusing the knowledge of him. They will not spend their time in disputing about matters of doubtful disputation, whether relating to doctrines, or to sects and parties, but will labour to promote the glory of their God. Whether they be Ministers or not, they will all be priests in their own families, and all be anxious to guide their friends and neighbours to the knowledge of the truth. Having experienced the life-giving virtue of that fountain, will they see their neighbours perishing with thirst, and not point it out? No: they will desire that others should "receive out of the fulness that is in Christ," and would have "all flesh to see the salvation of God."]

CCCCXCVI.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

Isai. xiv. 2. *They shall take them captives whose captives they were, and they shall rule over their oppressors.*

IN the midst of the prophecies relating to the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, we shall find many expressions which necessitate us to look forward to some other event for their full accomplishment. The destruction of Babylon is undoubtedly the subject of this and of the preceding chapter. The whole forms one prophecy, abounding with the most beautiful imagery, and, in point of composition, equalling, if not excelling, the most admired poems of antiquity. But if we could confine the preceding part of this verse, and the verse before it, to that event, (which yet we cannot with any propriety,) what must we do with the words before us? *they* were never accomplished at that period: the Jews did not carry the Babylonians into captivity; nor at any subsequent period did they rule over them. But if we understand these words as looking forward to another redemption, then will they be easy; and their accomplishment will be seen, not only in the Church at large, but in every individual member of it. The grace of Christ triumphed over all its opponents in the Apostolic age; and will in a yet more extensive manner in the Millennial period. The peculiar

peculiar way in which his grace triumphs, is a subject worthy of our more particular attention: and the words of our text afford us a fit occasion for setting it before you. We shall,

I. Trace a work of grace on the souls of men—

Taking such a view of it as is suggested by our text, there are four distinct states in which the Christian will successively be found:—a state,

1. Of captivity—

[This is the state of every man, before the grace of God enters into his heart. The Jews in Babylon were not more enslaved than we are by nature. Our principles and actions are altogether in bondage to *the world*. Nothing appears so free as the mind: yet, in our natural state, we are so shackled with prejudice, that we cannot exercise it aright: we cannot apprehend truth, when it is proposed to us: "the things of the Spirit of God appear even foolishness to us; neither can we receive them," because our faculties are preoccupied by the current sentiments of the world. Our ways too are under the same constraint. Custom has prescribed the paths in which we shall walk; and we dare not violate its arbitrary laws. Let us even see the light of a bright example set before us, we feel not ourselves at liberty to follow it. As far as fashion authorizes an holy life, we will go: we may perform a round of religious duties; but to cultivate real piety is contrary to our inclination, and beyond our power.

As the world by its maxims, so *sin* by its allurements, fetters and controuls us. So interwoven with all our faculties is sin, that we cannot resist its influence. Sooner might an Ethiopian change his complexion, or a leopard his spots, than the natural man break forth from the dominion of sin. Though he do not yield to it in a gross and shameless way, yet his thoughts and desires are altogether vitiated by it; nor is so much as one inclination or affection free from its malignant taint. A principle of evil resides within him, and dictates every imagination of his heart[a].

We may observe also, that *Satan* maintains a tyrannic sway over the natural man, as over his rightful vassal. How he works upon our minds, we cannot exactly say: (for we know not how our own spirit operates upon our material body; and therefore we must not wonder if we cannot declare how that wicked spirit operates on our spirits:) but he certainly does "work in all the children of disobedience," and "lead them captive at his will." And when the grace of God first comes into

[a] Gen. vi. 5.

into the soul, it finds us altogether under the power of "that strong man armed."]

2. Of conflict—

[The first entrance of grace into the soul stirs it up immediately to break its bonds, and assert its liberty. The person who is once enlightened to see what masters he has served, and what will be his recompence, is filled with indignation against himself for so long submitting to such ignominious bondage. He first probably begins with efforts made in his own strength: but when he finds how unavailing they are, he will betake himself to prayer, and implore help from above. Now the sins to which he once addicted himself, are resisted; and the very inclinations to them are bitterly bewailed. Now he cannot be satisfied with taking his notions of sin and duty from the world, or with conforming himself to the standard which the world approves: he inquires what God's will is, and determines to renounce whatever is inconsistent with it. Difficulties he meets with, innumerable difficulties, in his new course: his in-dwelling corruptions, like a stream obstructed by a dam, threaten to bear down all before them: and Satan exerts himself, by various wiles and devices, to divert him from his purpose: and the world, Satan's best advocate and co-adjutor, labours, by menaces or allurements, to keep him under its dominion: but he gathers strength from opposition, and courage from defeat; and resolves, that nothing but victory or death shall put an end to his warfare.]

3. Of victory—

[No person will long continue to oppose his spiritual enemies, without reaping the fruit of his exertions in victory and triumph. After he has once learned to use the armour which God has prepared for him, he finds, to his unspeakable comfort, that none of his enemies can stand before him. The world, that was once so formidable, has lost its power: and neither sin nor Satan can deceive him, as they once did. The grace of Christ is now found sufficient for him: and though he still is violently assaulted with various temptations, he is enabled to repel them "by the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit." Sometimes indeed he is ready to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" but soon he recollects himself, and adds, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."]

4. Of dominion—

[This is that state of which the text particularly speaks: and doubtless it is a state to which many attain. That the warfare will ever cease in this world, we have no reason to expect;

expect: but that our progress will be more easy, and our victory more certain, in proportion as we become habituated to the contest, there can be no doubt. As there are babes, young men, and fathers in the family of Christ, so are there amongst his army some, who have not only gained the victory, but are dividing the spoil. The world is crucified to them; sin is mortified; and Satan bruised under their feet. They are filled with a peace that passeth all understanding, and a joy that is unspeakable and glorified. The prize is, by anticipation at least, already in their hands. They enjoy already the earnest of heaven in their souls; and they are looking forward with delight to the happy hour, when they shall cease from their warfare altogether, and rest for ever in the bosom of their Lord.]

Though doubtless many variations will be found in the duration or degree in which the different parts of this experience exist in different persons, yet this, on the whole, is the experience of every true Believer: he emerges from his natural bondage, and comes forth into the liberty of God's children. Such, I say, is the work of Divine grace in the soul; and we shall now proceed to,

II. Make some observations upon it—

We remark then that this work is,

1. A stupendous work—

[None but God is equal to it. None but an Almighty Being could have created the universe out of nothing: nor can any other Being create anew the souls of men. Every good soldier of Jesus Christ must say, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God." The power exercised in this work is compared, by St. Paul, with that which was put forth in the resurrection of Christ, and his establishment on his throne, above all the principalities of heaven or hell[b]. Let all then who have within themselves an evidence that they are the subjects of it, rejoice: let them magnify their God in the energetic language of the Psalmist[c]: and let them "go forth, and shew what great things the Lord hath done for them."]

2. An effectual work—

[We wish not to discourage those who find difficulties in their warfare: but yet we must say, that God does not do his work by halves: (if we may so express it.) If he begin a good work in any soul, he will not suffer Satan to defeat his

[b] Eph. i. 19—21. [c] Ps. xxxv. 10.

his purpose. "He will give more and more grace," till it prove effectual to the end for which it is given. Grace that is not sufficient, (I mean, that does not finally prevail,) is not true grace. We know, that if a judgment be formed from the actual attainments of the religious world, we shall be ready to think that piety and carnality, and victory and bondage, can consist together. But they cannot; and those who with a religious profession unite an habitual subjection to any one sin, will feel themselves grievously disappointed in the issue. They may dream of plaudits from their Judge; but he will say to them, "I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity." "The weapons of our warfare are sufficiently powerful to cast down all the strong-holds of Satan," and to bring even our thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ:" the soldier therefore that yields to any one of his spiritual enemies, betrays his Lord; and for submitting to the chains of sin, will be bound "in chains of everlasting darkness."]

3. A work of which none need despair—

[A more desperate state than that described in the text, can scarcely be conceived: they were captives, and captives in a state of grievous oppression: yet they are not only delivered, but made to "rule over their very oppressors." Who then has any reason to despair? We may say perhaps, that our enemies are more powerful than those of others; that by our own consent they have acquired an indisputable right over us: and that therefore *we* cannot hope for deliverance. But God states, and answers, this very case[d]. And, not content with this, he makes his readiness to relieve such persons a prominent feature in his own character; as if he were especially to be known by it[e]. He makes his promises too to this very description of persons[f], as though he accounted himself most glorified, when the weakness of his people gave the most scope for the exercise of his almighty power[g]. To the weakest then, and to the most desponding, we would say with the Prophet, that though "without God the strongest of men should bow down under the prisoners, and fall under the slain[h]," yet "with him you shall be able to do all things[i]:" even "the lame shall take the prey[k]," and "the feet of the poor and of the needy shall tread down their mightiest enemies[l]."]

[a] Isai. xlix. 24—26. [b] Isai. x. 4. Jer. xxxvii. 10. [c] Amos v. 9. [d] Isai. xxxiii. 23. [e] Ps. lxxii. 4,12,13. [f] Isai. xxvi. 5, 6. [g] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [h] Phil. iv. 13.

CCCCXCVII.

IMMUTABILITY OF GOD'S COUNSELS.

Isai. xiv. 27. *The Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?*

IT is common with the Lord, when predicting distant events, to confirm men in the expectation of them by the accomplishment of something near at hand, Thus when God foretold the incarnation of his own Son by the prophet Isaiah, he foretold also the speedy destruction of the ten tribes, that the fulfilment of the one might excite in their minds an expectation of the other[a]: and when to Hezekiah he promised an addition of fifteen years to his life, he caused the shadow on the sun-dial of Ahaz to recede ten degrees, as a sign, that his life should certainly be prolonged to the period that had been fixed[b]. Thus in the chapter from whence our text is taken, and in that which precedes it, a very full and minute prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, and of the consequent restoration of the Jews to their own land, is given two hundred years before it was to be accomplished. But there was another event of great importance speedily to take place, namely, the destruction of the Assyrian army before Jerusalem: this therefore is introduced, not merely as an independent prophecy, but as a near event, which would assure to them the accomplishment of those which were more remote. It is in reference to all these events that the immutability of God's purpose is so strongly declared in our text, but more especially to those events which constitute the main subject of the prophecy.

The immutability of God's decrees is confessedly a very deep and mysterious subject, which we would not enter upon but with fear and trembling. We do not approve of bringing it forward on every occasion, and making it, as some do, the great subject of our ministrations: but we do not feel at liberty to pass it

[a] Isai. vii. 14—16. [b] Isai. xxxviii. 7, 8.

it over as if we were afraid of it, or as if we thought the inspired writers had erred in ever bringing it before our eyes. Now that it lies thus clearly in our way, we will proceed to give it the attention it deserves. We will consider it,

I. In a general view—

The Scripture continually represents God as having ordained every thing from before the foundation of the world—

[St. James, before the whole college of Apostles at Jerusalem, declared this as a truth unquestionably acknowledged by them all; "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world[c]." But, if they were known to him, they must be certain: and, if they were certain, it must be because he had ordained them so to be. Hence even the salvation of his people is said to be in consequence of his having elected them in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, and predestinated them to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself. In this he is represented as acting solely according to his own sovereign will, for the praise of the glory of his own grace, in conformity with his own eternal counsels: and all who finally obtain an inheritance in heaven, are said to have been "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, that they should be to the praise of his glory[d]."

Now to conceal, or to explain away, such expressions as these, is certainly not right. That they involve many difficulties, is true; but there are difficulties also on that side of the question which denies the existence of God's decrees: and it is far safer and better to receive with humility the declarations of God which we cannot fully comprehend, than to set ourselves determinately against them, and to impose on them a sense which they were obviously not intended to bear. The man that receives them with childlike simplicity, cannot doubt their general import, though he may doubt respecting inferences which may appear to be deducible from them.]

His decrees, to whatever they relate, are unchangeable—

[This also is plainly and strongly declared in the holy Scriptures. He has confirmed his word with an oath, on purpose that "*the immutability of his counsel* may be known[e]." If his purposes were changed, it must be either through the inward operation of his own mind, or through the outward operation of something else upon him: but in his own mind he

[c] Acts xv. 18. [d] Eph. i. 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12. [e] Heb. vi. 17.

he is altogether unchangeable; as he has said, "I the Lord change not[f]:" and St. James says, that "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning[g]." Nor can he be wrought upon by any thing from without: he cannot be deceived by subtlety; for "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord[h]:" nor can he be constrained by force; for "he doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; nor can any stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou[i]?" In a word, "He is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good[k]?" Yes, "His counsel shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure[l]:" "He is in one mind, and who can turn him[m]?" "His counsel standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations[n]."]

Whatever difference of opinion may exist about the abstract question of the immutability of God's decrees, there will be found little difference about it,

II. In reference to the particular points specified in the context—

It is *the practical use* of this subject that renders it so interesting to the Church of God: and it is *in that view only* that we wish to impress it on your minds. It is introduced by the Prophet in reference to two points:

1. The deliverance of God's people—

[The state of the Jews in Babylon was as hopeless as could well be conceived: but God foretold their deliverance from it, and their restoration to their own land; and that, though captives, and grievously oppressed, "they should take them captives whose captives they were, and should rule over their oppressors[o]." This God declared to be irreversibly decreed.

Now the same is true respecting the deliverance and salvation of all the Lord's people, in every age and quarter of the world. As the Jews were his elect, so is there now "a remnant according to the election of grace[p];" a people whom he has given to his Son[q], and to whom, as viewed in him, he gave a "promise of eternal life before the world began[r]." Now these he will search out, wherever they are, even amongst the remotest Gentiles[s]: and in due time he will call

[f] Mal. iii. 6.
[g] Jam. i. 17.
[h] Prov. xxi. 30.
[i] Dan. iv. 35.
[k] Numb. xxiii. 19.
[l] Isai. xlvi. 10.
[m] Job xxiii. 13.
[n] Ps. xxxiii. 11.
[o] ver. 1, 2.
[p] Rom. xi. 6.
[q] John xvii. 6, 9.
[r] Tit. i. 2.
[s] John x. 16.

call them by his grace[t], and bring them to the saving knowledge of his truth[u]. These also will he keep, and not suffer so much as one of them ever to be lost[x]. For their full and complete salvation God has made abundant provision in his word. If ever they should perish, it must be through their own departure from him, or through their being wrested out of his hands, or by his casting them off: but on all these heads he has revealed his immutable purpose and decree. Is it apprehended that they will depart from him? He will "put his fear in their hearts, that they may not do so[y]." Is it feared that either men or devils may wrest them from him? He assures us that "none shall pluck them out of his hands[z]," or "separate them from his love[a]." Is it supposed possible that he himself may cast them off and forsake them? He gives the fullest possible assurance to them all, that he will not do so[b]; that "not one of his little ones shall perish[c];" and that, however sifted, "not the smallest grain among them shall ever fall to the ground[d]." Their state may appear distressing, and even desperate, for a time; but God will not abandon them to themselves[e]; for "all his promises to them are yea and Amen in Christ Jesus[f]."]

2. The destruction of his enemies—

[Babylon, just previous to its destruction, seemed capable of defying all its enemies: but it was destroyed, precisely at the time, and in the manner, and by the person, that had been foretold two hundred years before. Thus, how secure soever God's enemies at this day may think themselves, they shall assuredly perish at the appointed time.

Of the people of God we have spoken as God's elect: but we are not therefore to imagine of God's enemies, that they have from eternity been doomed to destruction. No: though we maintain, and have not a doubt about, the doctrine of election, we do not believe the doctrine of absolute reprobation. It is true, we do not know where to draw the line so as to answer all the questions that may be asked. We acknowledge that we are ignorant, and contentedly ignorant, of many things relating to this mysterious subject: but, in our apprehension, God's *oath*, "that he willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that he should turn and live," is a satisfactory proof, that he has "not ordained any to wrath," except as the fruit and consequence of their own wickedness. We apprehend that the true distinction between the elect and non-elect is marked with admirable precision by the apostle Peter;

[t] Ezek. xxxiv. 11—13. [u] Isai. lxv. 1. [x] John xvii. 12.
[y] Jer. xxxii. 40. [z] John x. 27—29.
[a] Rom. viii. 33—39.
[b] 1 Sam. xii. 22. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. The Greek. [c] Matt. xviii. 14.
[d] Am. ix. 9. [e] Isai. liv. 7—10. [f] 2 Cor. i. 20.

Peter; who speaks of the elect, as saved purely in consequence of God's eternal choice; but of others, as perishing purely through their own obstinate unbelief, to which God has irreversibly decreed a sentence of eternal condemnation[g]. This is sufficiently plain, that, if God be true, the unrighteous, and unregenerate, can never enter into the kingdom of heaven[h]. We are ready to think, that God will rescind his decrees in relation to this matter; but he will not: he will not from pity; for however we may knock, and "cry, Lord, Lord, open to us," he will not open the door; nor, when "weeping and wailing and gnashing our teeth" with anguish, will he grant us so much as "a drop of water at our request to cool our tongue." Nor shall any be able to resist his will: for when he shall say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," we cannot maintain our ground one moment; nor, if we call on the rocks and mountains to fall upon us, can they afford us for a moment the desired aid. Even in this life the infliction of punishment is sometimes irreversibly decreed; and much more shall it be in that day, when God will only laugh at our calamity, and execute upon us all the judgments which he has denounced against us[i].]

REFLECTIONS—

1. On what a slender foundation are the hopes of the generality fixed!

[A strange idea pervades the great mass of the Christian world, that God will relax somewhat of his demands, and forbear to act agreeably to the strict tenor of his word: and, when we urge upon their consciences the strictness of his precepts, or the awfulness of his threatenings, they reply, 'God is too merciful to act thus; we have no fear but that he will relax somewhat of these things in the day of judgment.' Thus they hope that God's purposes shall change; and they contentedly rest their everlasting salvation on this ground. What an amazing infatuation is this! Oh, Beloved, think well, ere you determine to venture your everlasting happiness on such a presumption as this. Know that, in so doing, you absolutely bar heaven against yourselves; and render it impossible for God himself to save you. True, he can work faith in your hearts; but he can never save you in unbelief: "he cannot deny himself;" and if you will not seek

[g] 1 Pet. ii. 7—9. The words in Italics, ver. 8. should be omitted, and the word οἱ be translated *These*. Then the contrast observable in that whole passage will be complete. There is a double antithesis: Ὑμῖν οὖν πιστεύουσιν — ἀπιθοῦσι δὲ — — — οἱ προσκόπτουσι — ὑμεῖς δὲ —. See Doddridge's note on the place.

[h] 1 Cor. vi. 9. John iii. 3, 5. [i] Prov. i. 24—31. Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14.

seek him in his appointed way of faith and holiness, there "remains nothing for you but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, to consume you[k]."]

2. On what an immoveable foundation does the Believer stand!

[You are fixed upon a rock, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. We suppose indeed that you are not affecting to trust in God, whilst you are negligent in the use of his appointed means: *(that* would be to trust not *in God,* but *in a presumptuous unfounded conceit of your own:)* but, if you are "fleeing to Christ for refuge," then are you safe in God's everlasting arms; and he desires that you should be assured of this: yea, it is for this very end that he has confirmed his promise with an oath, even that you might be assured of the immutability of his counsel, and be filled with the stronger and richer consolation[l]. If a sense of your own weakness and unworthiness discourage you; then know that "God is able to perform all that he has promised," and that the consideration of his power and faithfulness is the very antidote which he himself has provided for all your fears[m].]

[k] Heb. x. 26, 27. [l] Heb. vi. 17. [m] Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

CCCCXCVIII.

GOD'S CHURCH AND PEOPLE SECURE.

Isai. xiv. 32. *What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.*

GOD is for the most part overlooked in the government of the world: and hence arise an overconfidence among some, and an undue timidity amongst others. But, if we viewed God as ordering and overruling every thing, even to the falling of a sparrow, we should undertake nothing ourselves without a direct reference to him; nor fear what was undertaken by others, whilst we had him for our Protector. This is the great lesson which we are taught in the passage which we have now read. The context contains a prophecy respecting the fate of Palestine. The Philistines had been

invaded and conquered by king Uzziah[a]; but in the days of Ahaz, Uzziah's son, they had regained their cities, and made reprisals on the provinces of the Jewish monarch[b]. At the accession of Hezekiah to the throne of Judah, they hoped to make yet further inroads on the Jewish territory: and the prophet Isaiah was inspired to foretell, that they should not only fail in their attempts, but be utterly vanquished by him, whom they so fondly thought to subdue and subjugate.

Read the passage in this view, and the whole address will appear extremely spirited and beautiful. "Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken"; (i. e. because thou hast triumphed over Uzziah's son:) "for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, or adder; and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent." (Uzziah bit thee only as a common serpent: but his grandson Hezekiah shall inflict a wound as fatal as an adder; and prove as irresistible as a fiery flying serpent.) "And the first-born of the poor (Jews, whom thou hast so oppressed) shall feed, and the needy (whom thou hast so terrified) shall lie down in safety: whilst thy root shall be destroyed by famine, and thy remnant with the sword." (Instead then of rejoicing, "Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou whole Palestina art dissolved: for there shall come from the north (Judea) a smoke (and dust of an army in full march:) and none shall be alone (or decline serving in this army) at the appointed time. (In the mean time,) "what shall one then answer the messengers of the nation," (when they come, full of alarm and terror[c], announcing thy preparations to invade the land of Judah?) Answer, "that the Lord hath founded Zion: and the poor of his people shall trust in it;" and that no weapon ever formed against them shall prosper.

The

[a] 2 Chron. xxvi. 6. [b] 2 Chron. xxviii. 18.

[c] The general interpretation of their being *foreign ambassadors sent to congratulate* Hezekiah. enervates the whole force of the passage, and is in opposition to the text itself, which speaks of them as the messengers of *the nation*, and not of foreign nations.

The words thus explained we shall consider as proclaiming,

I. An unquestionable fact—

"God has founded Zion"—

[He has founded it *in his eternal counsels;* and he has founded it also *in his covenant engagements.* He determined from all eternity that he would have a Church and People from amongst the sinners of mankind; and that he would get glory to himself from the introduction of sin into this lower world. For this end he entered into covenant with his co-equal, co-eternal Son; and engaged, that if he would become a man, and "make his own soul an offering for sin," he should have from amongst our fallen race, a people, who should be his purchased possession, and should for ever shew forth his praise[d]. This covenant being made, he gave to his Son "a multitude, whom no man can number, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues;" and agreed to accomplish in them all his good pleasure, and to bring them in due season to the full possession of that glory, which by their transgressions they had lost. To this the Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly refers, declaring, that he was invested with "power to give eternal life to as many as the Father had *given him*[e]:" and *under this character* the Lord Jesus Christ prayed for them[f], and committed them into the Father's hands to be kept for him[g], and declared his assured expectation of having them, in due time, as the trophies of his grace, and the partners of his glory[h].]

"The poor of his people also shall trust in it"—

[God never leaves his chosen people to trust in themselves: he never has done it: he never will do it. From the beginning he has made them to feel their need of a Saviour; and has caused them to build on "that foundation which he has laid in Zion." The institution of sacrifices even in Paradise (for we doubt not but that the beasts, with the skins of which our first parents were clothed by God himself, had been offered in sacrifice to God) taught them from the beginning to rely, not on themselves, but on a Sacrifice which should in due time be offered: and his grace has invariably wrought to the production of this one effect, according to that declaration of the prophet, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; and he that believeth shall not make haste, or, as St. Paul interprets it, shall not be ashamed[i]."].

But

[d] Isai. liii. 10. [e] John xvii. 2. [f] ib. ver. 9. [g] ib. ver. 11.
[h] John xvii. 24. [i] Isai. xviii. 16. with Rom. ix. 33.

But in the text there is also contained,

II. An instructive lesson—

It teaches us,

1. That our trust must be on God alone—

[To none can we look, but to our Covenant God and Saviour. There is no other foundation, but that which God has laid[k]; nor any other name whereby a human being can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ[l]. Hence his invitation, "Look unto ME, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth[m]." Hence also that solemn declaration, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me[n]." To confide in the creature, is to entail only a curse upon ourselves[o]. Whence was it that the Jews, with all their earnestness in following after righteousness, could never attain it? It was, because they would rely upon themselves, and not seek it by a simple exercise of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ[p]. So it will be with us also, if our reliance be not altogether on the providence and grace of God: for what God said to his people respecting the Egyptians, he says to us; "The creature shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still[q]."]

2. That confidence in him shall never be disappointed—

[When it is said in our text, "The poor of his people shall trust in it," the meaning evidently is, that by so doing they shall be secure. And certain it is, that "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; and that the righteous runneth to it and is safe." Find in the whole annals of the world one person who, when trusting in God, was disappointed of his hope. Did Manasseh rely on *the mercy* of God? He, even he, obtained pardon. Did Asa, or Jehosaphat, or Hezekiah, rely on *the power* of God? No enemy could withstand them. Did Abraham believe in *the truth and faithfulness* of God? The long-expected seed was given to him, that became "as the stars of heaven for number, and as the sands upon the sea-shore innumerable." Thus shall every one be blessed who putteth his trust in God: "he shall be firm, and immoveable as Mount Zion itself, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever[r]." The question, "Who ever put his trust in God and was confounded?" never has been, and never can be, answered, but in a way of universal negation.]

The

[k] 1 Cor. iii. 11. [l] Acts iv. 12. [m] Isai. xlv. 22.
[n] John xiv. 6. [o] Jer. xvii. 5. [p] Rom. ix. 30—32.
[q] Isai. xxx. 7. [r] Ps. cxxv. 1.

The text should be yet further viewed as,

III. A consoling truth—

It is unspeakably consoling,

1. In reference to the Church at large—

[Many are the enemies of the Church at this day, as well as in former times: nor were the Philistines half so envious at the prosperity of Zion, as millions of Christians, so called, are at this very hour. But when the Church was in its infancy, and had all the power and policy both of Jews and Gentiles combined against it, it stood as a rock, that defies all the efforts of the tempestuous ocean. The waves that menace its existence are dashed in pieces at its feet. So shall it still be to the end of time: whatever confederacies are formed against the Church shall come to nought: for "it is founded on a rock; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."]

2. In reference to the poorest and weakest of its members—

[The chief of its members are characterized as "a poor and afflicted people, who trust in the name of the Lord[s]:" and their conscious weakness often proves to them a source of great discouragement. But how consoling is the truth, that *they* are pre-eminently destined to receive the benefits of Christ's heavenly mission[t], and to be the objects of his peculiar care[u]. It is under the very character of persons poor and weak and destitute, that they are designated as triumphing over all their enemies; ("the foot shall tread them down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy[x]:") and their weakness is described as carried to the utmost extent that can be imagined, even as resembling that of persons, wounded, and captive, and dead; and yet in that very state is success insured to them; for "though lame, they shall take the prey[y];" "though captives, they shall take those captive whose captives they were, and shall rule over their oppressors[z];" and though slain, they shall rise and overcome, and "their enemies shall fall under the slain[a]." Hence the weakest amongst them all, "knowing in whom he has believed," may adopt the triumphant language of the Prophet, "The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me: who will contend with me? Let us stand together: who is mine

[s] Zeph. iii. 12. [t] Isai. lxi. 1—3. [u] Isai. xl. 11.
[x] Isai. xxvi. 6. [y] Isai. xxxiii. 23. [z] Isai. xiv. 2.
[a] Isai. x. 4.

mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me: who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as doth a garment: the moth shall eat them up[b]."]

APPLICATION—

[Look then, Brethren, to the Scriptures, to see what God has done in former ages———See what instruction is to be gathered from those Records, for your own conduct———And know, that God is as ready to "perfect his own strength in your weakness," as he has been in any instance from the foundation of the world———Only realize the thought of his universal agency in the government of the world, and of his watchful care over the interests of his peculiar people; and then "you need not fear, though the earth be moved, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea[c]." See David's composure amidst such troubles as drove his friends to despair: "In the Lord," says he, "put I my trust: how say ye then to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain; for, lo! the wicked bend their bow; they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart; and, if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" What? "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven:" and that is ample security for me[d]. Such composure may you also, even the least and weakest of you, enjoy, if you confide in God: for "there is no wisdom nor counsel against the Lord[e];" but "*his* counsel shall stand; and he will do all his will[f]."]

[b] Isai. l. 7—9. [c] Ps. xlvi. 2. [d] Ps. xi. 1—4.
[e] Prov. xxi. 30. [f] Isai. xlvi. 10.

CCCCXCIX.

TRUST IN GOD RECOMMENDED.

Isai. xxvi. 3, 4. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord* JEHOVAH *is everlasting strength.*

IT was designed of God that under the Gospel dispensation his people should enjoy a state of very exalted happiness. The Jews had a spirit of bondage, as servants: we have a spirit of adoption, as sons. In conformity with this idea, the Prophet, in the preceding chapter, speaks of the Lord as spreading a rich luxurious feast for all nations[a]; and, in the chapter

[a] Ch. xxv. 6.

chapter before us, records "A song which should be sung" by all the guests[b]. And well indeed may *they* sing, who are enabled to make such an appeal to God, as that which we have just read: well may they sing, who have the Lord JEHOVAH himself engaged to keep them in perfect peace.

May our hearts be tuned to join in this Divine anthem, whilst we,

I. Shew what blessedness God will confer on his believing people—

It is said by the voice of inspiration, "The faithful man shall abound with blessings[c]:" and again, "God will bless his people with peace[d]."

The Unbeliever is an utter stranger to peace—

[He may be stupid and insensible as a beast; but he can know nothing of real peace: even his apathy vanishes when once he begins to think of death and judgment. As his serenity resembles that of the irrational creation; so it arises from a similar source, a want of foresight or reflection in reference to the concerns of his soul. If he thinks of God, he is troubled, and will gladly have recourse to any thing to banish such uneasy reflections from his mind. This is his state, even when in the midst of all that the world accounts good and great: but how utterly devoid of peace is he, when once he is awakened to a sense of his real condition! Then he is full of terror, like the three thousand on the day of Pentecost; and, if he do not think of suicide, like the affrighted Jailor, he would gladly exchange condition with the beasts, if only the dissolution of the animal life might put an eternal period to his existence.

We speak not of the tumultuous passions by which the ungodly are agitated; because there are some who by the mere force of philosophy are enabled in a very great degree to moderate their feelings. But none can reflect on an eternity beyond the grave, without being appalled at the thought of the doom that awaits them, if they are unprepared to meet their God: so true is that which is spoken by the Prophet, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, that cannot rest: there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked[e]."]

But God promises this blessing to the Believer—

["The man whose mind is stayed on God, shall be kept in perfect peace." He shall have peace *in relation to his pardon and*

[b] ver. 1. [c] Prov. xxviii, 20. [d] Ps. xxix. 11.
[e] Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

and acceptance with God. Often in the days of his flesh did our Lord assure persons that their sins, though numerous, were forgiven[f]: and will he be less gracious to his people now? Though he will not give us that assurance by any audible voice, he will by the inward witness of his Spirit[g]. As once he sent "a Seraph to take a live coal from off his altar, and to touch with it the Prophet's lips, and to say to him, Thine iniquity *is* taken away, and thy sin *is* purged[h]," so will he now send his Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of promise, to apply the promises to our souls, and to be within us a pledge and earnest of our heavenly inheritance[i].

The Believer shall have peace also *in relation to his perseverance in the divine life.* He "knows in Whom he has believed, and that he is able to keep that which has been committed to him[k]." He knows that his Lord and Saviour is "able to keep him from falling, and to present him faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy[l]:" and whilst he contemplates heaven as an "inheritance reserved for him, he has the comfort of reflecting that he also is kept for it, even by the power of God through faith unto everlasting salvation[m]." Persuaded as he is that "He is faithful who hath promised[n]," and "able also to perform" his word[o], he is "confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in him will perform it until the day of Christ[p]," and "will preserve him blameless unto his heavenly kingdom[q]."

He shall have peace also *in relation to every thing that may occur in his way to heaven.* Numberless things arise of a temporal or spiritual nature to disturb the minds of those who are weak in faith: but when once "the mind is stayed on God," all these distractions cease. God is acknowledged as the author of all that is done, whether good or evil: not a sparrow, or a hair of our heads, falls to the ground, but by his special permission: and from whatever quarter trials arise, whether from voluntary agents, or unconscious elements, he is regarded as their true and proper source[r], and that consideration reconciles the soul to the dispensation[s]; yea, he acquiesces in it, assured that "all things shall work together for his good[t]." He is careful for nothing, because he "casts all his care on God[u];" and in humble prayer commits every thing to his all-wise disposal: and thus in a measure enjoys as much tranquillity, in relation to future events, as the birds of the air, or the lilies of the field[x].]

This

[f] Matt. ix. 2. Luke vii. 47.
[g] Rom. viii. 16.
[h] Isai. vi. 6, 7.
[i] Eph. i. 13, 14.
[k] 2 Tim. i. 12.
[l] Jude, ver. 24.
[m] 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.
[n] Heb. x. 23.
[o] Rom. iv. 21.
[p] Phil. i. 6.
[q] 2 Tim. iv. 18.
[r] Job i. 14—21.
[s] Ps. xxxix. 9.
[t] Rom. viii. 28.
[u] 1 Pet. v. 7.
[x] Matt. vi. 25—34.

This blessing God will bestow upon him, "*because* he putteth his trust in him"—

[There is nothing *meritorious* in faith, any more than in other graces: but there is in faith a *power* peculiar to itself: it engages the Most High God, and, if we might dare to use such an expression, we would almost say, binds him to exert himself in our behalf. When we lay hold on his word by faith, he feels his own honour pledged to fulfil our desire, and not to suffer us to be disappointed of our hope. Indeed, inasmuch as faith pre-eminently honours him, he delights to honour it: and to such a degree would he honour it, that, "if we had faith only as a grain of mustard-seed," that figure should be realized in our experience; we should be rooted up from this world, as a sycamore-tree from the earth; and though liable in ourselves to be tossed about by every wave, we should be fixed immoveably amidst the most tempestuous billows[y]. This is strongly intimated in the very words of our text, where the literal expression, as pointed out in the margin, is, "Thou wilt keep him in *peace, peace*," that is, in peace indubitably *certain*, uninterruptedly *abiding*, and richly *abundant*. If only we cherished an earnest expectation and hope" in God, verily "we should never be ashamed or confounded world without end[z]."]

Having thus shewn what God has prepared for them that love him, we would,

II. Urge you to seek that blessedness in God's appointed way—

God calls us all to trust in him:

1. Consider what a God we have to trust in—

[*Consider what "exceeding great and precious promises he has given to us."* There is not a situation or a circumstance wherein we can be placed, but God has given us promises exactly suited to it. It would be a highly profitable employment to extract from the Scriptures for ourselves the various promises contained in them, and especially those which apply more particularly to our own case; and then to spread them from time to time before our God in prayer. What sweet encouragement would this afford us, in all our addresses at the throne of grace; and what holy confidence would it create in us! If we have only a promise from a man like ourselves, it tends exceedingly to compose our minds: but how much more would this effect arise from apprehending the promises of a faithful God!

But *consider also how able God is to perform all that he has promised*

[y] Luke xvii. 6. [z] Phil. i. 20. Isai. xlv. 17.

promised to us. Truly "with him is everlasting strength:" "There is nothing impossible with him." "It is alike with him to save by many or by few." He can save with means, or without means, or against means. As for our weakness, or the strength of our enemies, it makes no difference to him. In the words following our text, it is said, "He will bring down them that dwell on high: the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust." Is it asked, By whom he will do this? it is added, "The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy[a]:" yes, "He will strengthen the spoiler against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress[b]." The weaker we are in our own apprehension, the more strong we are in reality; because "his power shall rest upon us," and "his strength be perfected in our weakness[c]."]

Let us trust in him with our whole hearts—

[There are persons who imagine they trust in God, when, in fact, they are trusting only in their own delusions[d]. There must be an express renunciation of every other hope[e], and an actual committing of our way to him in prayer[f]. There must be a direct exercise of faith in him, as able, and willing to effect whatsoever our necessities require; and a firm persuasion that he will do that which shall in the issue be best for us. This is implied in having "the mind stayed on him." We have a fine description of this state of mind contained in the prophecies of Isaiah: it is primarily indeed applicable to the Messiah; but is proper also to be realized in the experience of all the saints; since "all who fear the Lord" are exhorted in seasons of the deepest darkness and distress to set it before them as a model, and, after his example, to stay themselves upon their God[g]——How important this duty is, may be inferred from the *reiterated* injunctions given us respecting it[h]. Let us then "trust in God *at all times.*" In times of ease and security, let us remember that we are in his hands, and not be saying with ourselves, "My mountain standeth strong; I shall not be moved[i]." In times of trouble and distress, let us "not stagger at the promises through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God." Let us, after the example of David, say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation, and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God[k]."

This

[a] ver. 5, 6. See also Ch. xiv. 2.
[b] Am. v. 9.
[c] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.
[d] Isai. xlviii. 1, 2.
[e] Prov. iii. 5, 6.
[f] Ps. lxii. 8.
[g] Isai. l. 7—10.
[h] Ps. cxv. 9—11.
[i] Ps. xxx. 7.
[k] Ps. lxii. 5—7.

This is the kind of trust to which alone the promise is made. "If our faith waver, we shall receive nothing of the Lord[l]:" but if we commit our every concern to him, "our very thoughts," the most fluctuating of all things, "shall be established[m]," and "the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep (the affections of) our hearts and (the imaginations of) our minds, through Christ Jesus[n]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who know nothing of this blessedness—

[Do not suppose that this peace is merely ideal; and that, because you do not experience it, it has no existence in the Believer's mind: for it is the legacy of Christ to all his people: "Peace I leave with you; MY peace I give unto you[o]:" and it is indeed "a peace *that passeth all* understanding." It is not a mere absence of feeling, but a positive sense of reconciliation with God, a sweet consciousness of being under his protecting care, and a humble, yet confident, expectation, that he will order every thing for our eternal good. We cannot give a juster picture of it, than by referring you to the description given of it by the sweet singer of Israel[p]. Nothing alarms him, or disturbs his rest, because he knows that "his God is for him, and that therefore none can, with any effect, be against him[q]." "His God gives him quietness; Who then can make trouble[r]?"

And will you be content to continue ignorant of this happiness? Why should you do so? Christ has purchased it for "those who are afar off, as well as those who are near[s];" and he will confer it in rich abundance on all who call upon him[t].]

2. Those who through the weakness of their faith do not yet partake of it—

[How dishonourable is your conduct, and injurious to that God who redeemed you by the blood of his only dear Son! Whom has he ever deceived, that you cannot rely upon his promises? In what instance has he ever shewn himself deficient, either in faithfulness or power? What enemies also are you to your own happiness, at the time that you are so dishonouring him! "Has he not said to you, that, if you would believe, you should see the glory of God[u]?" "Believe in the Lord, so shall ye be established; believe his Prophets, so shall ye prosper[x]:" but, "if ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established[y]."]

3. Those who profess to enjoy that peace—

[Well

[l] Jam. i. 6, 7. [m] Prov. xvi. 3. [n] Phil. iv. 6, 7. See the Greek.
[o] John xiv. 27. [p] Psalm xxiii. [q] Rom. viii. 31.
[r] Job xxxiv. 29. [s] Eph. ii. 17. [t] Rom. x. 11—13.
[u] John xi. 40. [x] 2 Chron. xx. 20. [y] Isai. vii. 9.

[Well may we say with David, "O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee[z];" blessed is the man who with humble confidence can approach thee, saying, "O God, thou art my God." And are any of you brought to this happy state? O "cast not away your confidence, which has such great recompence of reward[a]:" "for then, and then only, are we partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end[b]." But, on the other hand, beware lest you abuse that confidence, and walk unworthy of your high calling: for, "if God has spoken peace" unto your souls, he especially enjoins you "never more to return to folly[c]." Let it be seen then what is the genuine effect of saving faith: and, if you call yourselves sons of God, and profess to have your portion with him in the world to come, then remember, that "every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as He is pure[d]."]

[z] Ps. lxxxiv. 12. [a] Heb. x. 35. [b] Heb. iii. 14.
[c] Ps. lxxxv. 8. [d] 1 John iii. 2, 3.

D.

CONVERSION OF THE JEWS GRADUAL.

Isai. xxvii. 12, 13. *It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the Holy Mount at Jerusalem.*

THE conversion of the Jews has till of late occupied a very small portion of attention in the Christian world: and even at this moment a sad indifference towards it too generally prevails. Notwithstanding the prophecies relating to it are so clear, the subject is scarcely ever brought before a Christian audience; and notwithstanding it is inseparably connected with the conversion of the Gentile world, it is overlooked for the most part as an event in which we have no interest. Degraded as the Jews are, God still declares, that "they are beloved of him for their fathers' sakes:" but by us, who are indebted to their fathers for all the light that we enjoy, they

they are neglected and despised, as though their souls were of no value. This unconcern for their welfare is even justified by us, from a mistaken notion that God will in some miraculous way effect their conversion suddenly, and without the intervention of human means. But, whilst the prophecy before us serves to correct that error, it encourages us to exert ourselves in their behalf, and to expect that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

In it we see,

I. The mercy reserved for the Jewish people—

That "they shall be gathered" from their dispersion, and "worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem," is certain: and,

1. It may well be thought that this shall be accomplished *literally*—

[There are even amongst wise and good men some who doubt whether the Jews shall *literally* be restored to their own land; and therefore I would speak with diffidence respecting it: but I confess that in my opinion the declarations of God respecting it are so strong and numerous, that I should scarcely know what to believe on the authority of Scripture, if I did not believe that. I will however content myself with mentioning only two passages; which yet, I consider as clearly determining the point. Moses, in one of his last addresses to the Jews, tells them, that if by their iniquities they should provoke God to drive them out of the land of Canaan, and to scatter them among the nations, yet he would, on their repentance, "have compassion on them, and gather them from all the nations whither they were scattered; yea, though they should be driven out unto the uttermost parts of heaven, even from thence would the Lord fetch them, and bring them again into the land which their fathers possessed; and do them good there, and multiply them above their fathers[a]." This was never verified at their return from Babylon, since they were not brought "from the uttermost parts of heaven," but almost exclusively from Babylon; nor did they ever afterwards become near so numerous, as they had been under David and Solomon. The other passage to which I will call your attention is taken from the prophet Zechariah, who wrote after their return from Babylon. Extremely particular is the prophet in stating the populousness and prosperity of the nation at the period of their final return to

[a] Deut. xxx. 1—5.

to their own land from their present dispersion: that "old men and old women should dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man walking with his staff in his hand for very age, whilst the streets should be full of boys and girls playing in them[b]." If it be inquired what period is there referred to, we are told, that it should be when ten men out of all languages of the nations should take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, "We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you[c]." When, I would ask, was this ever fulfilled? When were the Jews ever so high in favour with all the nations of the earth? At no past period assuredly: but they shall be at a future season, even at that season when God shall interpose to re-establish them in the land from whence they have been driven out. But, however this may be,]

2. It is confessed by all, that it shall be *spiritually* fulfilled—

[The Christian Church is called "Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," to which all true Believers are come[d]. And to it shall the Jewish people also come in due season. Scattered as they now are, and at the utmost possible distance from Christianity, the time is coming, when "the good Shepherd will seek and search them out, and bring them into his fold, and cause them to feed upon the mountains of Israel[e]." Then, says God, "I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; and he shall feed them, and be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them: I the Lord have spoken it[f]." Let this be compared with what the prophet Hosea says to the same effect; and no doubt can remain, either respecting whom it is spoken, or at what period it is to be accomplished[g]. Were we to take from the Old Testament all the passages which speak to the same purpose, we should transcribe no inconsiderable portion of the Prophetic Writings. But this is unnecessary, since there is not any one who believes the Scriptures, who does not believe that the Jews shall at a future period be converted to the faith of Christ, and acknowledge him as their Messiah. Yet we must on no account pass over the testimony of St. Paul, who occupies one entire chapter with this subject; assuring us, that there is yet among the Jews "a remnant according to the election of grace[h];" that "they shall again be grafted on their own olive-tree, from which for our sakes (though for their own transgressions) they have been broken off:"

[b] Zech. viii. 3—9. [c] ib. ver. 23. [d] Heb. xii. 22.
[e] Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16. [f] ib. ver. 23, 24. [g] Hos. iii. 5.
[h] Rom. xi. 6.

off:" and that as their temporary rejection from the Church of God has been the means of introducing the Gentiles into it, so shall their restoration to it be an infinitely richer blessing to the Gentiles than ever their rejection was, being to the whole Gentile world "as life from the dead."]

Regarding then the bestowment of this mercy to the Jews as certain, we proceed to state,

II. The way in which it shall be vouchsafed to them—

This we will trace,

1. In its commencement—

[The extent of territory originally assigned to them in God's covenant with Abraham, was that which is here specified in our text; it was from the river Euphrates to the Nile[k]. But, having been driven from thence, they are compared to an olive-tree which has been stripped of all its fruit, except a few that were either hidden from the owner, or inaccessible to him, on the topmost boughs[l]. God, however, will send his servants to seek out this scattered fruit, and to "beat it off," or shake it off, from the tree, in order to gather it for him. The success that will attend their labours will not be great: the Jews will be gathered only, as if it were, "one by one." But to them it will be a joyful event, that they have not been left to be devoured by the birds, but have been collected for the Master's use. This is elsewhere described by the same Prophet: "When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive-tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done: they shall lift up their voice; they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord; they shall cry aloud from the sea[m]." To the same effect, God speaks also by the prophet Jeremiah: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family (or tribe), and I will bring you to Zion[n]."

Such will be the effects produced upon the Jews at the commencement of the efforts that shall be made for their restoration to God. As it respects the mass of the dispersed, the first converts will be only a small remnant, a gleaning after the gathering has been made; as the Prophet has informed us: "Though the people of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant only shall return[o]:" but as it respects the complete in-gathering which shall ultimately follow, they will be as the first-fruits before the harvest, and the drop before the shower.]

2. In

[l] Rom. xi. 12, 15, 19, 20, 24.
[l] Isai. xvii. 4—6.
[n] Jer. iii. 14.
[k] Gen. xv. 18.
[m] Isai. xxiv. 13, 14.
[o] Isai. x. 22.

2. In its progress—

[In due time "the great trumpet will be blown," and the Jews that are scattered to the utmost ends of the earth shall hear it. The trumpets were, by God's command, to be blown on different occasions; and especially, for the convoking of the people to the tabernacle in the wilderness; for the regulating of their journeys towards the Promised Land[p]; and for the proclaiming every fiftieth year the year of Jubilee[q]. The Gospel is this trumpet, which will be "sounded out" through the whole world; and it will "come with power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance[r]," to "the outcast Israelites in the land of Egypt, and to those who are ready to perish in the land of Assyria." Then will that be fulfilled which is spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, "The watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion to the Lord our God. For thus saith the Lord; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child, and her that travaileth with child, together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born[s], &c. &c." ——— "Then shall the Lord set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people from Assyria, and from Egypt," &c.; "and shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." "And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, &c.: and there shall be an high-way for the remnant of his people which shall be left from Assyria, like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt[t]." Nor shall they come alone from the places of their dispersion; for vast multitudes will accompany them, insomuch, that "Israel shall be only as a third of the whole number, whom the Lord of Hosts will bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance[u]." Thus eventually "shall *all* Israel be saved: for this is God's covenant with them, when he shall take away their sins[x]."]

3. In

[p] Numb. x. 2. [q] Lev. xxv. 9. [r] 1 Thess. i. 5, 8. & ii. 13.
[s] Jer. xxxi. 6—14. Quote the whole of this.
[t] Isai. xi. 11, 12, 15, 16. [u] Isai. xix. 23—25.
[x] Rom. xi. 26, 27.

3. In its consummation—

[" They shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem:" and oh! what worship will then be offered in every place! the worshippers all so enlightened! (for " the light of the moon will then be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days[y]:") and their experience of heavenly things so deep! (for " the knowledge of the Lord will then cover the earth, not in extent only, but in depth also, as the waters cover the sea[z]:") and God revealing himself so gloriously in the midst of them! (for then " the sun will be no more their light by day, neither for brightness will the moon give light unto them; but the Lord will be an everlasting light unto them, and their God their glory[a].") Then will be realized, (at least in its incipient state,) that vision of the beloved Disciple, who says, " I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God[b]."]

SEE then from hence,

1. How groundless is the objection which so many raise against the efforts that are making for the conversion of the Jews, that they are useless—

[Many ask, not with grief and sorrow, but with a kind of malignant triumph, What good have you done? Your society has now been instituted several years, and what has been their success? I answer, that no person can reasonably expect to sow and reap on the same day. No other society has prospered at the first moment of its institution. Inquire of Missions to the heathen; Have they prospered all at once? How much less then can it be expected, that the Jews, with all their deep-rooted prejudices, should in a moment lay them all aside, and, overcoming obstacles greater than can be conceived, become at once the disciples of the despised Nazarene? But the Christian world have conceived a notion, that the Jews are to be converted all in a day. This however is a mistake. What God may do at a future period I presume not to say. I do myself conceive, that in God's appointed time, when God's servants shall " prophesy unto them," and " the great trumpet be blown" throughout the earth, there will be a resurrection of the dry bones; and they will rise " a great

[y] Isai. xxx. 26. [z] Hab. ii. 14.
[a] Isai. lx. 19—21. Cite the whole, with suitable remarks.
[b] Rev. xxi. 2, 3.

"a great army[c]." But this is not to be expected at the first commencement of our endeavours, as you have already heard. We are not taught to expect in the first instance more than the gleanings of an olive-tree: and, if we get "one of a city, and two of a tribe," and gather them from different places, "one by one," we are to account ourselves richly recompensed for our labours. How many, I would ask, did our Lord Jesus Christ, and his twelve Apostles, aided by seventy other disciples, convert in the four years previous to the day of Pentecost? Yet they wrought miracles in confirmation of their word. Was the smallness of their success during that period any ground for saying, that they had lost their labour, and that it would be useless to prosecute their object any further, especially since they must do it at so great a risk to themselves, and to all who should embrace their religion? Thus then I say, that as many have been gathered as, considering the contracted scale on which the efforts have been used, and the total want of a proper medium of access to them which till lately we have experienced, could in reason be expected. We grant that the converts have hitherto been few, and that yet for a season they may continue to be only as slender gleanings; but is this a reason why we should not search them out, and endeavour with care and labour to beat the tree? If an house with only half-a-dozen persons in it should be on fire, and some were exerting themselves for their preservation, what would you think of the humanity of the person who should deride and damp their efforts, from the consideration that they could only hope to benefit a few? Look at the text, and see the description given of the Jews: are they not "outcasts," and "ready to perish?" And is not this a sufficient reason to seek their salvation, though we should save from destruction only "one or two?" They are called "the lost sheep of the House of Israel:" and has not our Lord taught us, that, if there be only one of an hundred gone astray, we should go after that one and seek to bring it home? Yea, has he not, in this very connexion told us, that "it is not the will of your Father that one of his little ones should perish[d]?" Should not we then be like-minded with God, and determine, that not one shall perish through any want of effort on our part to save him? Should we not all unite as one man to carry into effect the purposes of God's love towards them? Is there any hope that the few which invite our labours, shall be gathered in, if there be none to beat or shake the tree? or can there be a general convocation of them to the Lord, if there be none to go forth and sound the trumpet in their ears? Know ye then, that we want instruments, active and zealous instruments, to do the

[c] Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10. [d] Matt. xviii. 12—14.

the Lord's work: we need pecuniary aid also, that we may send forth Missionaries to the ends of the earth, with the Gospel trumpet in their hands, and the love of God in their hearts, to make known to the Jews their Messiah, and to "bring them home as an offering to the Lord their God[e]." O that God would stir us all up to seek the welfare of the Children of Israel, and make use of *us* to hasten forward the period of their complete redemption!]

2. What we all need in order to our own salvation—

[Let us not, in our zeal for others, forget ourselves. We are all, with the exception of a small remnant, in as bad a state as the Jews themselves. The only difference between us is, that *they* are ignorant of Christ, but "*we* profess to know Christ, yet in works deny him." As far as respects vital godliness, we are as far from God as they. "All we like sheep have gone astray; and, no less than they, do we need to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls[f]." It is true of us, as well as of them, that the truly pious are but a remnant. "The god of this world" has the harvest; and the God of heaven nothing but "the gleanings." The Lord's people are but "a little flock;" and in comparison of the multitudes who go in "the broad road that leadeth to destruction," they are but "few" who "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow path." Forgive me then, if with holy violence I endeavour to "beat you off" from the tree on which you are yet standing, and to "gather you" for the Lord. Let me sound in your ears the Gospel trumpet, which proclaims "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound:" and let me intreat you to "return (as the remnant will assuredly do) to the living God[g]," "to worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem." We must be content, we fear, to "gather you one by one:" for, notwithstanding all the efforts that are made for the restoration of your souls to God, it is a melancholy fact, that we succeed but little better with you in the midst of all your advantages, than we do with the Jews in the midst of all their disadvantages. If we labour ever so much, and can reach only "two or three upon the topmost bough, and four or five upon the outermost bough," we are forced to be content, yea, and to think ourselves well repaid: so little power has the Gospel in the present day, and so sparingly is the Spirit of God poured out upon us. Know this however for your good. Whatever is necessary for the Jews, is necessary for us also. Must they believe in Christ? so must we. Must they give themselves up to him? so must we. Must they walk in his steps, and be conformed to his image? so must we. And sure I am, that the more we experience these blessings in our own souls, the more shall we labour

[e] Isai. lxvi. 20. [f] 1 Pet. ii. 25. [g] Isai. x. 21.

labour to communicate them to the whole world, and more especially to those for whose sake God has imparted to us the superior blessings we enjoy[h].]

[h] Rom. xi. 30, 31.

DI.

THE GOSPEL A SOURCE OF BLESSINGS TO MANKIND.

Isai. xxix. 18, 19. *In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness: the meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.*

THERE is a day frequently spoken of in Scripture under the emphatical title of "*that* day:" and it sometimes refers to the Apostolic age, sometimes to the Millennial period, and sometimes to the day of judgment. Commentators in general consider the first of these to be the time designated by that expression in the text. To this they are led by their interpretation of the preceding verse; which they understand thus: "In a very little while, Lebanon (the Gentile world, which has hitherto been a mere desert) shall be turned into a fruitful field (by means of the Gospel which shall be published); and the (hitherto) fruitful field (of the Jewish Church) shall be esteemed as a forest (or desert). And in that day (of the destruction of the Jewish Church and polity) shall the deaf hear the words of the book, &c. &c." But I should rather incline to consider the second period, namely, the Millennial era, as the time intended: because I have no conception of "Lebanon," which is constantly used in Scripture to characterize grandeur and fertility, being applied to designate a mere desert. I apprehend rather that in that verse there is a climax, descriptive of the state of the Church when the Jews shall be gathered into it: that *then* "Lebanon (which now is desolate) shall be turned into a fruitful field; and the fruitful field (such as it will then exist) shall be esteemed as a forest;" seeing that "the handful of corn cast upon the

the top of the mountains" will spring up so abundantly, that "*the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon*[a]." This is the kind of climax which often occurs in relation to that very period. It may be seen in Chap. lxv. 20. where it is said, in reference to the protracted age to which men will then live, that "a person dying at the age of an hundred years will die a mere child, and be accounted as one accursed," that is, cut off prematurely, under a stroke of judicial vengeance. In Chap. xxxii. 15, also, the very expressions of the text are again used in this precise view: "When the Spirit shall be poured from on high, (it is said,) the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." Thus I understand the prophet as saying in our text, that "*in a very little while*" (it was but a little while even in Isaiah's days, but now it is just at hand,) the Jews shall be converted to the faith of Christ, in such numbers as to be like the woods of Lebanon; and THEN the poor benighted Gentiles also shall be gathered into the fold of Christ, in a way and to an extent altogether unprecedented from the first publication of Christianity to that very hour.

In this view of the passage it has an equally favourable aspect both upon Jews and Gentiles: on Jews, to shew what blessings are in reserve for them, (and now just about to be poured out upon them;) and on Gentiles, who will by their means experience, as it were, throughout the whole world, "a resurrection from the dead[b]."

It is not however my intention to insist on this point: but, waving any further notice of the Millennial period, I shall simply shew,

I. What is that book to which the attention of all men shall be called—

It is here called "the book;" and must undoubtedly be, the book of revelation, in which all "the visions" of the seers, and the predictions of the prophets, are contained. This is the book in relation to which God had poured out upon the Jewish nation a spirit

[a] Ps. lxxii. 16. [b] Rom. xi. 12, 15.

a spirit of deep sleep, and had closed their eyes, even the eyes of their prophets, their rulers, and their seers; insomuch that it was altogether as "a sealed book," which, "whether delivered to a learned or unlearned man," was equally unintelligible to him[c]. So completely were its contents hidden from them, that "the wisdom of their wise men perished, and the understanding of their prudent men was hid[d]."

From the New Testament we are able to speak more definitely on this point, and to say that this book is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: for this is the description which St. Paul gives of the Gospel, in reference to the very chapter before us. He says, that he was sent to preach the Gospel; but that it was to the great mass of his hearers "foolishness:" agreeable to what had been written; "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." "To the Jews," he tells us, "it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto those who were called, whether Jews or Greeks, it was Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God[e]." This book contains the "hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world; which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory[f]." Indeed "the natural man, whoever he be, cannot receive it; for it is foolishness unto him: neither can he know it, because it is spiritually discerned," and can be known only through the influence of God's Spirit upon the soul[g].

Thus by comparing the account given of this book by an inspired Apostle, *in reference to the very chapter before us*, we may with certainty declare what book is here intended.

Now, as the Gospel is the book which the deaf are to hear, and the blind to see, it will be proper,

1. To enter a little into its contents—

[It reveals to man a Saviour. It declares that God, in tender

[c] ver. 10—12. [d] ver. 14. [e] 1 Cor. i. 18, 19, 23, 24.
[f] 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8. [g] ib. ver. 10—14.

tender mercy to our fallen race, sent his only dear Son into the world, to make an atonement for us, and to effect by his own obedience unto death our reconciliation with him———— The Old Testament revealed this as to be effected in due season; and the New Testament gives an account of it as already accomplished———— The New Testament moreover sets before us all his invitations and promises, together with the promise of the Holy Spirit, to render the whole effectual for our complete and final salvation————]

2. To shew briefly, that this is indeed God's destined instrument for the salvation of the world—

[It is that with which he wrought from the very beginning: for, though it was comparatively but obscurely revealed, yet it was to this that Adam looked, as holding forth a promise of the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head: and to this the faith of Abel had respect, when he presented the offering of a firstling to the Lord. To this also Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Patriarchs, and all the Prophets, and all the Saints and Martyrs of the ancient Church, had respect: they viewed it through the medium of types and prophecies; and though they had not actually received the promised Saviour, they were saved by him, just as we are who live so many centuries posterior to his advent[h]. There never was, nor ever shall be, "any other foundation" for a sinner's hope, or "any other name whereby a sinner can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ."]

Having shewn what "the book" is, we are led to notice,

II. Its transcendent excellency—

It comes to the whole world, and commends itself to all,

1. As suited to their wants—

[It might be thought, that, whatever offers it made, it would be of no use, if men had not eyes to see it, or ears to hear it: but it engages that the deaf shall hear it, and that the blind shall see it out of obscurity and out of darkness. It not only presents to us things suited to our spiritual senses, but it gives us the very senses, whereby we are enabled to apprehend them. Now this is of peculiar importance; for there is no man by nature who has any spiritual discernment whatever: all are both deaf and blind: and, if any imagine that they are exempt from the general malady, they only prove the more strongly the universality of this truth. Under these

[h] Heb. xi. 4, 13, 39, 40.

these two figures may be comprehended all the necessities of our fallen nature: for as a person who has from his birth been destitute of sight and hearing can possess no intellectual attainments, so those who are by nature cut off from all means of spiritual discernment must be destitute of spiritual good. Yet is there no spiritual good which the Gospel will not impart to those who seek it: because it will give both the blessing itself, and the faculty whereby it is to be enjoyed.

It were well if this matter were more generally considered; for it would cut off many sources of despondency, by which the people of God are discouraged. Nothing is more common than to consider a want of natural talent as an almost insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of Divine knowledge; and more especially to regard long-contracted guilt as a ground for apprehending an utter exclusion from the hopes of the Gospel. But the Gospel meets the ignorant and the guilty with the same free offers of mercy as are presented to the possessors of learning and morality; and it takes occasion from their very discouragements to press on them in particular the acceptance of its benefits: "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst (a more desperate case can scarcely be painted;) I the Lord will hear them; and will open for them rivers of waters in high places (the very reverse of what might naturally be expected), and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water[1]." Whatever then be any man's necessities, let him turn the greatness of those necessities into a plea, as David did; "Be merciful unto my sin, O God, for it is great!" and let him know, that the greater his necessities are, the more will God glorify himself in the supply of them.]

2. As sufficient for their necessities—

[Nothing is wanting to make the Gospel of Christ effectual. Human wisdom can add nothing to the teaching of God's Spirit. Man's righteousness can add nothing to the righteousness of Christ: nor can his strength add any thing to the strength communicated from on high. On the contrary, the least reliance on any thing human will invalidate every thing that is divine: for God will do all, and have all the glory, or leave man to his own inadequate and unassisted efforts. Of itself, it is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;" and "mighty through God to the pulling down all the strong holds" of sin and Satan. If only it come in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, nothing can stand before it. It has already prevailed to a vast extent over the powers of darkness, and in God's good time it shall "subdue all nations to the obedience of faith."

One

[1] Isai. xli. 17, 18.

One effect in particular it invariably produces, wherever it is received in Spirit and in truth; it imparts "a joy with which a stranger to it intermeddleth not." "The meek are they who will receive it; and they will increase their joy in the Lord: and the poor among men, for whose advancement it is pre-eminently designed, shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel." Others may possess carnal joy: but these shall have a joy *in the Lord*, "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory."]

APPLICATION—

[Why should not "that day" be already come? Whether it be come or not to Jews or Gentiles, there is no reason why it should not be come to you. How blessed would it be to see the commencement of that day amongst you! See what is said of it in another part of Isaiah's prophecies: "Then *the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped:* then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert[k]." Dear Brethren, implore help from God: and he will come now at last to give efficacy to his word, and to make it the power of God to the salvation of your souls.]

[k] Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

DII.

THE WORK OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS PEACE.

Isai. xxxii. 16, 17. *Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.*

THROUGH the introduction of sin into the world, man was altogether despoiled both of holiness and happiness: and the design of God in sending to us his Gospel was, to restore both the one and the other to our fallen race. This in a former chapter is set forth under the image of the brute creation, which, having through the fall of man been reduced to a state of the greatest disorder, shall be restored once more to universal harmony and peace. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox: and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den: they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea[a]." In the passage before us the same truth is set forth under a different image, namely, that of the vegetable creation; which, having been reduced to the condition of a wilderness through the curse inflicted on it, shall be rendered fruitful, even beyond the most fertile parts of Palestine in the most fruitful seasons.

That the passage really relates to the times of the Gospel, does not admit of doubt. In the beginning of the chapter it is said, "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness; and princes shall rule in judgment: and a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land[b]." A season indeed of great desolation should intervene between the prophecy and its accomplishment[c]: but at the appointed time "the Spirit should be poured out in such abundance from on high, that the wilderness should become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be so productive as to be counted for a forest."

In my text the metaphor is explained: and we are told in plainer terms what shall be,

I. The character of Gospel times—

By "judgment and righteousness," I understand not merely that which is called justice between man and man, but universal holiness. And this will certainly characterize the Gospel dispensation—

[This is evident *from the very metaphor before us.* In other parts of this prophecy the metaphor is yet further opened and explained. Thus in the 35th Chapter it is said, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose: it shall blossom

[a] Isai. xi. 6—9. [b] ver. 1, 2. [c] ver. 9—14.

blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God ..... For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert ..... And an high-way shall be there, and a way; and *it shall be called the way of holiness:* the unclean shall not pass over it; but *the redeemed* shall walk there[d]." The change itself also is described in appropriate terms: "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off[e]." The works of the flesh are here contrasted with the fruits of the Spirit: and it is declared, that these latter shall abound on the face of the whole earth; and that, "as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations[f]."

This is yet further evident *from the universal testimony of Scripture.* If we look into the Old Testament, we find the prophet Ezekiel describing that period thus: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh: and *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes;* and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them[g]." In the New Testament the same thing is continually declared. Even before the birth of our Saviour, Zacharias, speaking of him as about to visit and redeem his people, represents the end of his advent as being to "deliver his people out of the hands of their (spiritual) enemies, *that they may serve him without fear in righteousness and holiness* before him all the days of their life[h]." And St. Paul assures us, that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation, was designed to teach us, that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*[i]."

But it is not the occasional existence, so much as the abiding habit, of holiness, which is to distinguish this day—

["Judgment is to *dwell,* and righteousness to *remain,*" in this our field. At all times, and under all circumstances, piety is to prevail. We are to be "fruitful in *every* good work[k], and "*filled*

[d] Isai. xxxv. 1, 2, 6, 8, 9. [e] Isai. lv. 13. [f] Isai. lxi. 11.
[g] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. [h] Luke i. 67—75.
[i] Tit. ii. 11, 12. [k] Heb. xiii. 21.

"*filled with* the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God[l]." Our blessed Lord told his Disciples, that he "had ordained them that they should go and bring forth fruit, and that their fruit should remain[m]:" and through the whole world are they to be distinguished as "a holy nation[n]," "a peculiar people zealous of good works[o]."

Now it is greatly to be desired, that this distinction should be visible amongst us. But, if a heathen were directed by this mark to find the Gospel ministered in its purity, would he fix on *us*, on us individually, on us collectively, as possessing that inestimable treasure? Would he, if he followed us to our respective places of abode, and beheld the whole of our deportment through the day, and witnessed our spirit and temper under circumstances of trial, would he say, "That is the garden of the Lord, and those are the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, in which he is glorified[p]?"———O Brethren, look well to this matter, and take care that you "shine as lights in a dark world, holding forth the word of life," not by your profession merely, but by the whole of your conduct and conversation[q].]

That you may be encouraged to these exertions, consider,

II. The fruit of Gospel experience—

"The fruit of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever." To this also the whole Scripture bears witness: and it is confirmed by fact also, that happiness is the inseparable companion of true piety. It is an attendant on piety,

1. As the natural result of holy habits—

[A man cannot commit sin, but he will find it sooner or later productive of pain. He may roll it as a sweet morsel under his tongue for a moment; but it will prove the gall of asps within him. There is no exception to that truth, "The way of transgressors is hard." But there is not a grace which can be exercised that does not tranquillize the mind. All imaginable graces, whether towards God or man, may be resolved into the one principle of love: and how sweet that is, we need not to observe: it carries its own evidence along with it. In truth, this is the very thing asserted in our text; "The fruit of righteousness *is* peace:" peace is the odour which that holy ointment invariably diffuses; as the Psalmist has said,

[l] Phil. i. 11. [m] John xv. 16. [n] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [o] Tit. ii. 14.
[p] Isai. lviii. 11. & lxi. 3. [q] Phil. ii. 15, 16.

said, "*In* keeping God's commandments there is great reward."

If it be thought that the duties of penitence and self-denial are rather of a painful nature, we appeal to all who know what penitence and self-denial are, Whether they have not found an exquisite joy in penitential sorrow, and a more lively satisfaction in the exercise of self-denial, than in all the gratifications which sin could possibly administer? We say again, without fear of contradiction, that there is no exception to this rule.]

2. As bringing with it the testimony of a good conscience—

[This is a source of unspeakable comfort: "Our rejoicing is this," says the Apostle, "the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world[r]." It will not unfrequently happen that our principles and conduct may be misinterpreted; so that we may incur blame on account of those very things, which, if rightly viewed, would have entitled us to applause: but, if we have a consciousness that we have really endeavoured to fulfil the will of God, we shall not lay much to heart the obloquy that is cast upon us, but shall say with the Apostle, "It is a small matter to be judged of you or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self: but he that judgeth me is the Lord[r]." In the hour of death more especially will peace and assurance fill the soul of one who has truly and unreservedly devoted himself to God. Not that he will be trusting in a well-spent life as meritorious in the sight of God, or as able to justify him at the bar of judgment: no man who knows any thing of the Gospel can entertain such a delusive hope as that; for the whole Scriptures testify that Christ alone is the foundation of a sinner's hope, and that no man can be accepted of God but through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus: but still a consciousness that we have truly lived to God and for God, in holy obedience to his commands, will be to us an evidence of the truth of our faith, and the sincerity of our love; and will inspire us with confidence in reference to the future judgment: for St. John says, "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall *assure* our hearts before him: for if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things: but, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God[s]." And hence we may say to the whole world, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace[t]."

3. As being honoured with tokens of God's special approbation—

[God

[r] 2 Cor. i. 12. [s] 1 John iii. 18—20. [t] Ps. xxxvii. 37.

[God will "manifest himself unto his people as he does not unto the world." He will "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and by the immediate influences of "his Spirit bear witness to, and with, their spirits, that they are his children." He will "seal, as it were, their souls unto the day of redemption," and give them already "the earnest and foretaste of their eternal inheritance." But who are these favoured people? Are they those who live in a neglect of holy duties, and in the commission of any known sin? No: "If any man regard iniquity in his heart, the Lord will not hear him[u];" much less will he favour him with such communications as these. But "of his children, who keep his law, great shall be the peace[x]," even "a peace that passeth all understanding:" "they shall go forth with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before them into singing; and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands[y]."]

LEARN then from hence, Brethren,

1. How to approve yourselves Christians indeed—

["By their fruits ye shall know them," says our blessed Lord: and again, "Bring forth much fruit; *so* shall ye be my disciples:" "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." You well know that it is in this way that you form your estimate of a field, or of a tree: and this is the only true way of estimating your own character. Your professions are of no value, any further than the truth of them is attested by your practice. You may say, Lord, Lord, with as much confidence as you will: but, if you do not the will of your heavenly Father, Christ will disown you, and cast you from him at the last day. You may now so resemble the wheat amongst which you grow, as not to admit of being easily distinguished from it by a human eye, or separated from it by a human hand. But in the last day the tares and the wheat will be infallibly separated from each other; the one for the fire of hell, the other for the granary of heaven[z]. I say then, bring yourselves to this test: and never be satisfied with any faith or any profession, that does not approve itself genuine according to the standard of God's unerring word.]

2. How to be happy in your own souls—

[It is not any earthly gratification that can make you happy. Our Lord does not say, Blessed are the rich, the gay, the respected; but, "Blessed are the humble, the pure, the meek, and those who are even persecuted for righteousness' sake[a]." We grant, that this is far from according with the sentiments of the world at large; but it is not the less true on that account. They who have never sought for happiness in God,

[u] Ps. lxvi. 18. [x] Isai. liv. 13. Ps. cxix. 165.
[y] Isai. lv. 12. [z] Matt. xiii. 28—30, 40—43.
[a] Matt. v. 3—12. Luke vi. 20—26.

God, can have no idea of the happiness that is to be found in him. But the more any one knows of the world, the more will he see that "Vanity and vexation of spirit" is written upon every thing that is in it. Seek not then your happiness, Beloved, in "broken cisterns that can hold no water, but seek it in the fountain of living waters[b]," even in Him who is a source of blessedness to all his people[c]. Then shall you here enjoy "a full assurance of hope," whilst you live[d]; "have an abundant entrance into heaven" when you die[e]; and sit down for ever "at the right hand of your God, where there is fulness of joy for evermore[f]."]

[b] Jer. ii. 13. [c] Ps. xxxvi. 9. [d] Heb. vi. 11.
[e] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. [f] Ps. xvi. 11.

DIII.

PROTECTION PROMISED TO THE GODLY.

Isai. xxxiii. 16. *He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.*

WE cannot judge of men's moral state by the dispensations of God's providence towards them. Among the Jews indeed virtue was inculcated and enforced chiefly by temporal sanctions; and their national prosperity or adversity bore a very manifest reference to their national conduct. In some degree also the same observation will extend to individuals among them. But to us, under the Gospel, God has not bound himself to distinguish his favourites by any temporal advantages. Nevertheless, what the pious Jews enjoyed visibly in relation to their bodies, that the obedient Christian shall enjoy invisibly in his soul.

To enter properly into the subject before us, we must consider,

I. The character to whom the promise is made—

This appears clearly in the two preceding verses; in one of which it is implied, and in the other it is clearly expressed:

1. He is sincere in his profession of religion—

[The greater part of the Jews were "sinners in Zion, and

and hypocrites;" and they had good reason to tremble for their approaching calamities. The person spoken of in the text is placed in direct opposition to them: he really belongs to Zion, and to Zion's God: he does not make religion a cloke for habitual and indulged lusts; or profess what he does not experience: if he implore mercy as a "miserable sinner;" and declare his trust in the mere "mercy of God through Christ Jesus;" and desire "that he may henceforth live a sober, righteous, and godly life, to the glory of God's holy name," he does not mock God with unmeaning words, or hypocritically assume a character which belongs not to him: he feels in his heart what he utters with his lips; and desires to fulfil his duties in Zion, as much as to enjoy her privileges.]

2. He is consistent in the practice of it—

[He has learned in a measure that important lesson, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good[a]." The whole tenor of his conversation is agreeable to the strictest rules of righteousness. In all his dealings he is both just and honourable, not taking advantage of the ignorance or necessities of others, but endeavouring to do as he would be done unto. Nor is he less observant of his words than of his actions: he not only "walketh righteously," but "speaketh uprightly:" he rigidly adheres to truth, and avoids every deviation from it, whether in criminating others, or exculpating himself.

As he thus "cleaves to what is good, so he abhors that which is evil." Could he gain ever so much by an act of oppression, or were he offered ever so great a bribe to bias his judgment and to violate his conscience, he would "despise the gain," and "shake from his hands the polluted gift" with utter abhorrence. Were he advised to do any thing injurious or vindictive, he would "stop his ears" with indignation, and not allow the thought for one moment to dwell upon his mind. Did a contaminating object present itself to his view, or any thing whereby his own corruptions might be stirred up, he would "shut his eyes," even like holy Job, who "made a covenant with his eyes that he would not look upon a maid[b]."

We say not that the Christian is never drawn aside through the influence of temptation and corruption; (for then where shall we find a Christian upon earth?) but if at any time he be overtaken with a fault, he returns to God with deepest humiliation and contrition, and renews his course with increased vigilance and circumspection.

That this is indeed the character to whom alone the promise in the text is made, is evident from parallel passages in the Psalms[c], and from the strongest possible declarations in the

[a] Rom. xii. 9. [b] Job xxxi. 1. [c] Ps. xv. 1—5. & xxiv. 3—5.

the New Testament[d]. O that all persons, whether professors of religion or others, would duly consider this! Our conduct must be upright towards God and man: we must embrace the religion of the Gospel with sincerity, and adorn it by a holy conversation: nor can a person of any other character than this have any part or lot in the promises of God.]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The promise itself—

To understand this, we must consider the occasion whereon it was delivered. The Assyrian army, that had overrun almost the whole of Judea, were now encompassing Jerusalem. The wicked Jews are given up to terror and consternation; but the righteous are encouraged with a promise of,

1. Protection—

[A fortress situated on an eminence which no weapons can reach, and founded on a rock which no human efforts can shake, may be considered as impregnable. Such a place should Jerusalem be to God's obedient people.

To us who are surrounded with spiritual enemies, the promise has a spiritual import. "The archers will shoot at us:" the world, the flesh, and the devil will combine against us to destroy us: but the true Christian "shall dwell on high," out of their reach; and "his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks" which cannot be undermined. If his enemies wound his body, they shall "not be able to kill his soul;" for *that* is "hid with Christ in God:" and he may say to his enemies, as Hezekiah said to the besieging and blaspheming General, "The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee[e]."]

2. Provision—

[There are but two ways in which a fortress, which will not capitulate, can be taken; namely, by assault or famine. Against both of these God promised to guard his obedient people: for as their fortress should be impregnable, so it should be supplied with manna from heaven, and with water springing out of the rocks on which they dwelt. To us also the promise may be applied with strictest propriety. Our enemies may deal with us as with Paul and Silas of old, who were cruelly scourged, and thrust into an inner prison, and their feet were made fast in the stocks: but, though there was no access to them for earthly friends, were the visits of

[d] 1 John iii. 6—10. [e] 2 Kin. xix. 21.

of their God intercepted? Could their supplies of strength and consolation be cut off? Did not rather their consolations abound as their afflictions abounded? Thus it shall be with us: "bread shall be given us" for the support of our souls, and "the Holy Spirit shall be *within us* a well of water, springing up" for our continual refreshment. Difficulties and dangers we may experience; but they shall issue only in the confusion of our enemies, and in brighter discoveries of God's power and grace.]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who rest in presumptuous hopes—

[The wicked Jews laughed at the judgments of God when they were at a distance, but were filled with horror at their approach, and cried out, "Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Similar consternation will ere long seize on those who now slight the threatenings of the Gospel. The day of vengeance is hastening on apace, and God will then shew himself to be "a consuming fire[f]." How will his enemies then stand appalled[g]! How "will they cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb[h]!" How terrible will the devouring fire then appear! How awful those everlasting burnings in which they will be doomed to dwell! Let the "sinners in Zion," the people who name the name of Christ without departing from iniquity, awake from their delusions; let "the hypocrites" also deceive themselves no longer. Let a holy fear possess all our souls: let us cry out, as on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do to be saved?" and let us improve the present season of God's mercy and forbearance in "fleeing from the wrath to come."]

2. To those who are agitated with unbelieving fears—

[Many spend their time in anxious inquiries, Will God save me? Well would it be if we would leave God to do his part, and mind only our own. *God's part is, to save us: ours is, to serve and glorify him.* This is obvious in the passage before us, and in numberless other passages of Holy Writ. We have nothing to fear but sin. Let us be sincere in embracing the Gospel, and consistent in obeying it, and we need not fear the united attempts of men and devils. God is engaged to be the God of his believing and obedient people: and, "if he be for us, who can be against us?" He will "hide us in his pavilion[i]," where we shall be surrounded with hosts

[f] Heb. xii. 29.
[g] Ps. lxxiii. 19.
[h] Rev. vi. 15–17.
[i] Ps. xxvii. 5.

hosts of angels for our guard, and supplied with the richest viands for our support: and "in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh us[k]." Let us then dismiss our unbelieving fears, and look to him to "fulfil his promises, wherein he has caused us to put our trust."]

[k] Ps. xxxii. 6, 7.

DIV.

GLORIOUS PROSPECTS OF THE GOSPEL CHURCH.

Isai. xxxv. 1, 2. *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose: it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.*

AS the planting of the Jews in Canaan was accompanied with the slaughter of the Canaanites, so in every age the establishment of God's Church on earth is represented as immediately connected with, and in a measure consequent upon, the judgments inflicted on her enemies. This appears, as in many other places, so especially from the words of our text; which are a continuation of the prophecy contained in the preceding chapter, or rather, a transition from one part of the subject to another part of the same subject. In the foregoing chapter, the destruction of the Edomites was predicted, as introductory to the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom. But the devastation of their country by Nebuchadnezzar did not by any means correspond with the strong expressions used to describe it; nor did the reformation under Hezekiah at all answer to the exalted terms in which the prosperity of Zion is set forth. The true sense of the passage must be found in events yet future. Edom is here considered as a type of all the Church's enemies, which at some future period will be fearfully destroyed; and then will the Church be enlarged and prosper, in a way that has never yet been seen upon earth. "For *them*," that is, *for those judgments* before spoken of, "will

"will the wilderness and the solitary place be glad," because they will open a way for the accomplishment of God's gracious designs towards his Church and people.

The words, as thus explained, lead us naturally to contemplate,

I. The state of persons and places unenlightened by the Gospel—

Whatever advantages any place may possess, it is, if destitute of the Gospel, a dreary wilderness—

[Let us suppose a place in point of beauty and fertility like Paradise itself; let it be the seat of arts and sciences, the emporium of commerce, the centre of civilized and polished society; let it abound with every thing that can amuse the mind, or gratify the taste; still, What is it without the Gospel? What does it afford that can nourish an immortal soul? No heavenly manna is found there; no wells of salvation are open to the thirsty traveller; none are at hand to point out the way to life: its only produce is thorns and briers, which entangle, and impede, and wound us, every step we take; and on every side are snares and temptations, which, like noxious animals, lie in wait for us, ever ready to accomplish our eternal ruin. The cities of Athens and of Rome must in this respect be viewed on a level with the most desolate spots upon the globe: for, whatever they might furnish for the edification or comfort of the carnal mind, they would afford no nutriment to him who was perishing for lack of spiritual food.]

The same observations we must make in relation to the souls of men—

[Whatever strength of intellect a man may possess, or however deeply he may be versed in every branch of human learning; whatever amiable qualities he may have to distinguish him from others; yea, whatever actual enjoyment he may receive from the riches, the honours, the pleasures of the world; yet is his soul "a wilderness," "a solitude," "a desert:" God is not there: the fruits of the Spirit are not found there: no heavenly consolations are ever tasted by him: he is without a track, without a guide, without a shelter in the day of trouble, and without any other prospect than that of falling a prey to enemies, or perishing with hunger. The unenlightened soul is compared by Jeremiah, not to a desert merely, but to "a heath in a desert, where no good ever comes[a]." O that those who fancy themselves "rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing, were made sensible,

[a] Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

sible, how wretched they are, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked[b]!"]

Let us turn from this humiliating contemplation, to consider,

II. The state to which they are brought by the Gospel—

Beautiful is the description given by the prophet of the change that is wrought by the Gospel of Christ. The souls of men assume altogether a new aspect. In them is found,

The beauty of the rose—

[Where there was but lately no appearance of life, now there arise a holy desire after God, a delight in heavenly exercises, a love to all the people of the Lord, and an ambition to resemble God in righteousness and true holiness. First, but a blossom appears; but gradually the rising foliage bursts from its confinement, and expands itself to the eyes of all, diffusing fragrance all around it. The Believer, blessed in himself, makes the very place of his residence a blessing; according to that description given of him by the prophet Ezekiel; "I will make them, and the places round about my hill, a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing[c]." Thus by the power of his Gospel "the Lord comforts Zion; he comforts all her *waste places*; he makes her *wilderness* like Eden, and her *desert* like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness are found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody[d]."]

The stability of the cedar—

[The woods of Lebanon were proverbially grand: its cedars and its pines grew up to heaven, and defied all the storms with which they could be assailed. This was "the glory of Lebanon:" and this glory shall be given to all who are "rooted and grounded in the Lord." Weak as the beginnings of grace are in the Believer's soul, he shall "shoot forth his roots as Lebanon," and become "a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that HE may be glorified[e]." Storms and tempests will beat upon him; but they shall only cause him to take deeper root, and to evince more clearly, in the sight of all men, that "God's strength is perfected in his people's weakness[f]." In like manner shall the Church at large be kept; and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."]

The fruitfulness of the richest pastures—

[Carmel

[b] Rev. iii. 17. [c] Ezek. xxxiv. 26. [d] Isai. li. 3.
[e] Isai. lxi. 3. [f] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

[Carmel and Sharon were famous for their pasturage and flocks: such excellency shall be seen wherever the Gospel is preached with life and power. How precious are the ordinances made! What pastures are laid open in the word of God! How strengthening and refreshing does that feast become, which the Lord Jesus Christ has prepared for us at his table! The souls, thus richly fed, "grow up as calves of the stall:" the trees, thus watered by "the river of God," abound in all manner of fruits, even in "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God." Contemplate every "fruit of the Spirit[g];" and that is what is produced by "every plant which God's right hand hath planted."]

Unutterable joy as the result of all—

[The expressions in our text fitly characterize the state of those who are brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel: they "are glad, and rejoice, and blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing." Let any one who has ever beheld a desert brought by cultivation to a fruitful field, and seen it "standing so thick with corn as to laugh and sing;" let him contemplate it awhile; and he will have a faint image, though a very faint one, of "a wilderness" place or person that is "made to blossom as the rose." O that we might behold the picture realized in *this* place, and that every one amongst us might have the image of it in his own soul!]

But it is necessary that we should draw your attention to,

III. That particular view of the Gospel by which these effects are wrought—

It is not by a mutilated and perverted Gospel that these effects are produced, but by *a simple exhibition of Christ crucified*, and of *the perfections of God as united and harmonizing in the work of Redemption.*

To this it is uniformly ascribed in the word of God—

[Look at the Prophets, and you will find it is "*the glory of the Lord*" that they speak of, as *revealed to* men by the Gospel, and as *seen by men* in order to their conversion[h]——— Look at the Apostles, and the same truth is attested by them all; insomuch that they all "determined to know nothing in their ministrations, but Jesus Christ and him crucified:" the one object which they sought by all possible means to attain, was,

[g] Gal. v. 22, 23.

[h] Ps. cii. 16. Isai. lx. 1, 2. & xl. 5. & Ps. xcvii. 6. Hab. ii. 14.

was, so to preach, that "God might shine into their people's hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ[i]:" and till they saw "Christ formed in them," they were satisfied with no change however great, no profession however confident[j]. The commission given to them all, was, to "say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" and this they all fulfilled, saying to their people from time to time, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world[k]!"]

To this also must the effect be traced in the experience of all—

[Who that hears a perverted Gospel, is ever brought effectually to God by it? We may represent the Gospel as a kind of *remedial law*, that supersedes the necessity of perfect obedience, and requires only sincere obedience in its stead; or we may represent the Gospel as proposing a salvation partly by Christ's righteousness, and partly by our own; but we shall never see such effects produced as are described in our text. Let this matter be scrutinized; and the more it is scrutinized, the more the truth of it will be confirmed. It is notorious, that in some persons, and some places, a great change is wrought: and it will be found to be owing to this one thing, that "Christ is preached," and he is received into the heart as "All in all[m]." The people are made to "see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God;" and therefore do they rejoice, and consecrate themselves to the service of their God and Saviour. Hence also is their stability; for they would rather die a thousand deaths, than renounce their hope in him: and hence also their fertility; for they think they can never do enough for him, who has done and suffered such things for them. And this is expressly declared by the Apostle: "We beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord[n]."]

OBSERVE,

1. What encouragement is here for those who minister in holy things—

[Ministers, especially when invited to labour among unenlightened heathens, are apt to draw back, under an idea that they can never hope to reap a crop in such a soil. But, if God has promised that "the wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose," why should we despond? Is not his word as quick and powerful as ever? and can he not, by whomsoever, or to whomsoever it is delivered, make it "sharper than any

[i] 2 Cor. iv. 6. [j] Gal. iv. 19. [k] Isai. xl. 9. [l] John i. 29.
[m] Col. iii. 11. [n] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

any two-edged sword," so that it shall be "the power of God to the salvation of men?" Only let "his Spirit be poured out from on high, and the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest[o]." Though the corn be but an handful, and cast on the summit of a barren mountain, its produce shall be great, and your harvest sure[p].]

2. What encouragement also for those who are dejected on account of the state of their own souls—

[When all your grounds of dejection are stated, they amount to no more than this, that your hearts are a very "desert." But "God's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that he cannot hear." Possibly you may feel additional ground of despondency, because you have backslidden from the Lord, and therefore fear that he will give you up to final impenitence. If so, then plead with him *that* promise which is made to persons in your very condition; and rest assured, that he will fulfil it to you, if you trust in him[q]. You may wait long, as the husbandman does, for the fruit of your labour; but you shall not wait in vain[r].]

[o] Isai. xxxii. 15.

[p] Ps. lxxii. 16. Here would be the place to enlarge, if it were a *Mission* or a *Visitation* Sermon.

[q] Hos. xiv. 4—7. [r] Jam. v. 7, 8.

DV.

THE WAY TO ZION,

Isai. xxxv. 8—10. *And an highway shall be there, and a way; and it shall be called, The way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; it shall not be found there: but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

IN the Volume of Inspiration, the progress of the Gospel in the Apostolic and Millennial periods is often set forth as a counterpart of the redemption of Israel from the land of Egypt. The power effecting the conversion of men, and all the blessings attending it, are described in terms precisely similar to those which, in their literal sense, are applicable only to the deliverance of the Hebrews from their Egyptian

Egyptian bondage. The power exerted for its accomplishment is the same, as are also the blessings attendant on it. The prophet Isaiah speaking of that day, when Christ, "the root of Jesse, shall stand for an ensign, to which the Gentiles shall seek," says, "The Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod. And there shall be *an highway* for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; *like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt*[a]." It is of the same periods, and the same events, that he speaks in the chapter before us, and especially in the words of our text; wherein he describes,

I. The way which is prepared for the redeemed to walk in—

Strange as it may appear, the text itself, if not taken in connexion with other passages, may give us an erroneous notion respecting the way of life and salvation. The way is called, and justly called, "The way of holiness:" but we are not therefore to suppose that there is nothing necessary for our salvation but the performance of some good works: for the same prophet, who in our text calls the way to Zion "The way of holiness," tells us more fully in another place, that it is the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ[b]. To mark this, and to bear it ever in mind, is of great importance and indispensable necessity; since our Lord Jesus Christ himself assures us, that "HE is *the way*, the truth, and the life; and that *no man cometh to the Father, but by* HIM[c]."

Bearing this then in mind, that the way to heaven is *solely by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*[d], we observe respecting it, that it is,

1. A high and holy way—

[As, in forming a highway, the stones are cast up, and the road

[a] Isai. xi. 10,15,16. & Mic. vii. 15. [b] Isai. lxii. 10—12.
[c] John xiv. 6. [d] Eph. ii. 8, 9.

road is made above the level of the adjacent ground, so is this way far above the low and groveling paths which are trodden by the world around us: and they who walk in it are walking comparatively "in the high places of the earth." Raised above the miry clay of sin, it is a holy path: the faith itself is a "most holy faith[e];" and they who are brought to it, are "called with a holy calling[f]," and are themselves "a holy nation[g]," "a peculiar people, zealous of good works[h]." Persons who are ignorant of the Gospel, are ready to suppose that the doctrine of salvation by faith only must be injurious to the interests of morality: but the very reverse of this is true: for they, and they only, who look to Christ for salvation, have either will or power to fulfil the high demands of the Gospel: they, and they only, desire to be "sanctified throughout, in body, soul, and spirit[i];" and *that* is the holiness, which alone is acceptable in the sight of God[k]. No latitude is allowed to any man: there is the same law for all: and every statute, every ordinance, every injunction in the whole Gospel has the same tendency to make us holy: the more the laws and regulations of Christ's family are scrutinized, the more it will appear, that "*This* is the law of the house; behold, *this* is the law of the house[l]."]

2. A strait and narrow way—

[It is "not for the unclean, but for the redeemed alone." Not that there is any prohibition to any man to walk in it; but the ungodly have no inclination to walk in it: the work of mortification and self-denial is to them distasteful; nor have they any root in themselves from whence the fruits of the Spirit can proceed. But to the redeemed the whole work of holiness is delightful: it is the very element they delight to move in: so far from wishing to be left at liberty to commit any sin, they would gladly "have every thought of their heart brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ[m]." They consider holiness as the very end of their new creation[n], yea, the very end also for which they were elected[o], and to which they were predestinated, from all eternity[p]: and, if they could have the desire of their hearts, they would "be holy, as God himself is holy[q]," and "pure, as God himself is pure[r]." Justly therefore is it said by our Lord, that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it[s]."]

3. A

[e] Jude ver. 20.
[f] 2 Tim. i. 9.
[g] 1 Pet. ii. 9.
[h] Tit. ii. 14.
[i] 1 Thess. v. 23.
[k] Heb xii. 14.
[l] Ezek. xliii. 12.
[m] 2 Cor. x. 5.
[n] Eph. ii. 10.
[o] Eph. i. 4.
[p] Rom. viii. 29.
[q] 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.
[r] 1 John iii. 3.
[s] Matt. vii. 13, 14.

3. A plain and obvious way—

[To those who have no experience of its power, the Gospel, both in its doctrines and precepts, is altogether foolishness[t]: but it is so only because they are ignorant of its real nature: they are blinded by Satan and their own lusts[u]; and, like the Syrian host, fancy that they are journeying to the heavenly city, when in truth they are going into the heart of an enemy's country, even to the regions of darkness and despair[x]. But "what God has hid from the wise and prudent, he has revealed unto babes[y]:" and to those whose eyes he has opened, the way is clear as the light itself. "The knowledge of it is easy to him that understandeth[z]:" for a light shines upon it; and "the Angel of the Covenant goes before them in the way, to lead them to the city prepared for them[a]." Thus "darkness is made light before them, and crooked things straight[b]:" and if at any time they are perplexed with any important doubts, they need only to look up to God, and they hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it;" by which they are kept from "turning either to the right hand or to the left[c]." Nor is this the privilege of the learned only, but of all, even the meanest and the least, seeing "they have an unction of the Holy One that teacheth them all things[d]:" and so direct is their way made, "that the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." Of course, we must not be understood to say, that any person is infallible: but this we do and must affirm, that none, however weak, shall be left to mistake the path to heaven, since God has pledged himself to us, that "the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way[e]."]

4. A safe and secure way—

[It is probable that the strong expressions in our text may refer more particularly to the Millennial state: for they exactly agree with what the prophet Ezekiel has manifestly spoken with an immediate reference to that day[f]. But they are true to a certain extent in every age: for though there are lions, and, above all, that "roaring lion, the devil, seeking to devour us," they are all either chained, that they cannot reach us, or restrained, that they cannot hurt us[g]. Though therefore "the redeemed" appear an easy prey to their enemies, they walk at large without any anxious fear. By faith "they see horses of fire and chariots of fire round about them[h];" and they know that "they could have legions of angels sent them."

[t] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [u] 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. [x] 2 Kings vi. 19.
[y] Matt. xi. 25. [z] Prov. xiv. 6. [a] Exod. xxiii. 20.
[b] Isai. xlii. 16. [c] Isai. xxx. 21. [d] 1 John ii. 20, 27.
[e] Ps. xxv. 8, 9. [f] Ezek. xxxiv. 24, 25.
[g] Dan. vi. 22. with Ps. lxxvi. 10. [h] 2 Kin. vi. 15—17.

them[l]" at their request, if they stood in need of their protection. They are sensible indeed of the number, the power, and the malice of their enemies; but as persons travelling through places infested by wild beasts make a fire round them and are secure; so *they* feel themselves secure, because "God himself is a wall of fire round about them, and their glory in the midst of them[k]."]

Such is the way to Zion: and O that God by his Holy Spirit may draw us, whilst we declare,

II. The happiness of those who journey in it!

"Happy indeed art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord[l]:" thrice happy they who walk in his ways! Inexpressibly happy are they,

1. Throughout all their journey—

[Did Israel, when redeemed from Egypt, sing praises to their God[m]? Much more do they who are redeemed from death and hell: as soon as ever they are "brought out of the horrible pit, and have set their feet upon the King's highway, there is a new song put into their mouth, even praise unto our God[n]." It is true they are represented by the prophet, even "the whole company of them, the blind and the lame, the women with child, and she that travaileth with child together, as coming with weeping and with supplication[o];" but this is so far from destroying their joy, that it is the very root from which it springs, the seed from which the harvest of joy proceeds[p]. There is in the weeping of a real penitent a holy tenderness, which is no less grateful to his soul than the livelier ebullitions of joy itself: yea, so deeply does he feel his own unworthiness, that he would not wish to "rejoice, but with trembling; nor, if he were transported to heaven itself, would he so exult, as to forget to cast his crown before the Saviour's feet[q]." Indeed this very mixture of ingenuous shame with triumphant exultation is intimated by the prophet Jeremiah, who, immediately after representing the saints as "weeping," proceeds to paint their happiness as most sublime, not only on account of the deliverance they have experienced, but on account of the continued communications of all spiritual blessings to their souls[r]——And well may we expect them to "return with singing," when they consider from what paths they have been brought, and to what a glorious state they are "coming;" and, above all, by what a price they have been ransomed, even by the blood of God's only Dear Son. Had they

[l] Matt. xxvi. 53. [k] Zech. ii. 5. [l] Deut. xxxiii. 29.
[m] Exod. xv. 1. [n] Ps. xl. 2, 3. [o] Jer. xxxi. 8, 9.
[p] Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6. [q] Rev. iv. 10.
[r] Jer. xxxi. 11—14, See also xxxiii. 11.

they been "redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold," they could not but rejoice; but having been ransomed "by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot[s]," they are filled with wonder; and are ready almost to account it all a dream[t]; like Peter, who, when delivered from prison, could scarcely credit his deliverance, but "thought he saw a vision[u]." Doubtless this joyous frame does not exist in all alike, nor in any equally at all times: their remaining infirmities are sometimes called forth to the wounding of their consciences, and the clouding of their souls. Even Paul himself sometimes cried, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" But still, by renewed applications of the blood of Christ to their souls, their consciences are purged from guilt, and their joy in the Lord is revived. Thus, whilst they go through the valley of Baca, they find wells of salvation, from which they draw water with joy, and are refreshed; and thus they go on from strength to strength, till they appear before God in Zion[x].

2. At their journey's end—

[It has been just observed, that "sighing and sorrow" occasionally interrupt the Believer's joy; and indeed they follow him at a greater or less distance all his journey through: but when once he arrives at the gate of heaven, those blest inhabitants, "joy and gladness," come forth to meet him; and "sorrow and sighing flee away." Then is his joy uninterrupted and unmixt; for he is introduced into "the presence of his God, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore." Could we but get a glimpse of him in those sacred mansions, could we behold the raptures with which he tunes his harp to the praises of his God and Saviour, truly we should proclaim him blessed beyond all expression or conception. Let us then look into heaven; (for so it is permitted us;) and let us listen to his voice. Methinks we hear the full chorus of the Redeemed, singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing[y]!"———And, if we inquire concerning them, "Who they are? and Whence they came?" we shall be informed distinctly, not that they were innocent in themselves, or had done so many good works, but, that "they had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. *Therefore* are they before the throne of God." And that which constitutes no small measure of their happiness is, an inward consciousness that it shall continue for ever without any mixture, intermission, or end: "They shall hunger no more, nor thirst

[s] 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. [t] Ps. cxxvi. 1, 2. [u] Acts xii. 9.
[x] Ps. lxxxiv. 6, 7. [y] Rev. v. 9—18.

thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes[z]." What an amazing change is this, even from the best state that can be enjoyed here below! Well may it be said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord;" for, whilst every thing painful has for ever passed away[a], they are unceasingly occupied in the immediate vision and complete fruition of their God.]

EXHORTATION—

[Permit me now to address myself to every individual amongst you. And what terms can we find more apposite, than those wherein Moses addressed his Father-in-law? "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel[b]." Consider, what a blessed way it is: it is "the good old way[c]," wherein the Prophets and Apostles walked; yea, and wherein our blessed Lord himself walked, "leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps[d]." What way can the world point out that is comparable to this? Think too of the end to which it leads: shall not this thought engage you to come with us; and not only to begin with zeal, but also to "run with patience, the race that is set before you?"——As for you who have commenced your journey heavenward, lift up your hearts to God, that he would enable you to "hold on your way[e]," and "so to run that you may obtain the prize[f]." Pray that you may never be weary, never halt, never turn back; but that your course may be uniformly holy; or rather, that "your light may shine more and more unto the perfect day[g]."]

[z] Rev. vii. 9—17.
[a] Rev. xiv. 13. with xxi. 4.
[b] Numb. x. 29 See also Mic. iv. 2.
[c] Jer. vi. 16.
[d] 1 Pet. ii. 21. 1 John ii. 6.
[e] Job xvii. 9.
[f] 1 Cor. iv. 9.
[g] Prov. iv. 18.

DVI.

HELP FOR US IN GOD.

Isai. xxxviii. 14. *O Lord, I am oppressed: undertake for me!*

THE time of death is an awful season to every Child of man: but it may be more or less terrible, according to circumstances. There may in that hour be such manifestations of God's presence vouchsafed to the soul, and such bright prospects of a glorious immortality,

immortality, as altogether to divest death of its sting, and to render it an object of intense desire. On the other hand, there may be such darkness of mind, or anguish of body, or such urgent considerations of a personal or domestic nature, as may exceedingly embitter the thoughts of approaching dissolution. The account which we have of Hezekiah's feelings on an occasion like this, fills us with deep commiseration. His disorder was so violent, that he expected every day to be his last; and God seemed to him like a lion, ready to break all his bones, and to devour him every instant. Hence "he mourned as a dove; and his eyes failed with looking upward:" and in utter despair of help, except from God, he poured out the prayer which we have just read, "O Lord, I am oppressed: undertake for me!" There were in his case some peculiar reasons for deprecating with more than common earnestness the impending stroke: for he was but in the middle age of life; and hoped to proceed with the work of reformation which he had successfully commenced through the whole nation. In the event of his removal too, he had no son to succeed him: and he feared that the people, just beginning to return to the Lord their God, would immediately relapse into all the idolatries, from which he had strenuously exerted himself to reclaim them. To this chiefly we trace the extreme desire which he expressed for the prolongation of his life, and the overwhelming agony with which, in the words before us, he committed his cause to God.

But here we see,

I. The privilege of God's people in seasons of deep distress—

They are at liberty to commit their every concern to God—

[Of whatever kind their trials may be, they may spread them all before the Lord, with a confidence that he will afford them effectual relief. They may even "cast all their care on God himself," in an assured hope that he will "undertake for them," and take upon himself the entire charge of all their concerns. They may commit to him the directing of their path,

path, the supplying of their wants, "the keeping of their souls," not doubting but that, as their Creator, their Governor, and their Redeemer, he will be faithful to his own engagements, and execute for them whatsoever in his unerring wisdom he sees best for them— — —]

This is their most inestimable privilege—

[They are not left to bear their burthens alone: if they were, they would utterly sink under them. We see in the case of Job how difficult it is to support affliction; (for even he at last cursed the day of his birth:) and daily experience shews us how unable any of us are, of ourselves, to bear up under the various trials of life. But we have a God to go unto; a God who says, "Cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee." As for spiritual trouble, we are no more able to endure it than Judas was, who, from a sense of guilt, took refuge in suicide. If "help were not laid upon One that is mighty," upon One who says to us, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" what hope could any one of us enjoy? But with such a Refuge, and such a Friend, we may well be satisfied: for "He is both a sun to enlighten us, and a shield to protect us; and he will give both grace and glory: and no good thing, either in time or in eternity, will he withhold from us," if we humbly and unfeignedly commit our cause to him.]

In Hezekiah's use of this privilege, we see,

II. The success that shall attend the exercise of it—

It is of little importance to inquire how far the application of a fig to Hezekiah's boil was an appropriate remedy for his disorder. Whatever its operation was, it was God alone that rendered it effectual: and the same Divine power can give success to any means which shall be used for *our* good, either in a temporal or spiritual view. The imminence of our danger is no bar to God's interposition. All that he wants is, the prayer of faith: and that once offered, the deliverance, how difficult soever it may be, shall be vouchsafed.

Only let us commit our cause entirely to God—

[We must despair of help from the creature. God permits our trials to increase, in order to produce this very effect upon us. "We must have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we may not trust in ourselves, but in God, who raiseth the dead." Whilst there is any mixture of self-dependence in us, God will not interpose: but when, like Peter sinking in the

the waves, we cry, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" he will instantly stretch out his almighty hand, and afford us the succour we implore.]

His intervention then shall bear upon it the evident stamp of his Divine agency—

[In a multitude of instances in which he "undertook for his people" of old, his power was as evident as in the passage of the Red Sea, or in the ruin of the walls of Jericho. I say not that his interposition in our behalf shall be as visible to the eye of *sense:* but to the eye of *faith* it shall. Wonderful will be the support which he will give to the troubled spirit; insomuch that, whilst all outward circumstances remain the same, it shall have "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Look at the 107th Psalm: it is realized every day. Such are the spiritual distresses of God's people, and such their deliverances in answer to their prayers———If therefore there be any one that is now "oppressed" with any grievous affliction, let him go to the Lord Jesus Christ, and spread his wants before him, with confidence that he shall not pray in vain. Let the 143d Psalm be his pattern and his encouragement. David there says, "My spirit is overwhelmed within me, and my heart within me is desolate. But I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land. Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit: cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning, for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee[a]." Spread your wants before your God in that way; and be assured, that "though heaviness may continue for a night, joy shall come to you in the morning." "God will not contend with you for ever, lest your spirit should fail before him:" but "he will be with you in trouble," and "be to you a light in your darkness," and "give you songs in the night." "These things will he do to you, and not forsake you," till "he has turned your mourning into dancing, and put off your sackcloth, and girded you with gladness:" for "never yet failed he any one who trusted in him;" "nor said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain."]

[a] Ps. xliii. 4—8.

DVII.

FORGIVENESS KNOWN AND ENJOYED.

Isai xxxviii. 17. *Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.*

IN all the Scriptures there is not any thing more tender and pathetic than this "writing of Hezekiah after he had recovered from his sickness." In it he delineates all his feelings in the view of his expected dissolution. He could appeal to God that he had "walked before God in truth and with a perfect heart[a];" and yet in the prospect of death was more alarmed and agitated than any other person of whom we read. To account for this, Commentators have supposed that he had respect only to the welfare of his Church and people, who by his removal would lose the benefit of all his past exertions for their good, and of those which he yet contemplated. But whilst we agree in ascribing much of his grief to this, we yet think that it by no means sufficiently accounts for many of his expressions, which evidently refer to his own personal concerns. In our text he complains that "for peace he had had great bitterness;" though from it he was now mercifully relieved. His "anguish being now changed[b]," he returned thanks to God, saying, "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

These words of his I shall,

I. Explain—

They may not unfitly be considered as referring to,

1. The recovery of his body—

[Sickness and death were originally introduced by sin: and in many instances have they been inflicted in token of God's displeasure on account of sin. The leprosy of Miriam was a visitation on account of sin, as was that also of Gehazi. And the worms which preyed on the vitals of king Herod received their commission from an offended God. Even

[a] 2 King. xx. 2, 3. [b] So Bp. Lowth translates the first clause.

Even the Christian Church is exposed to the same kind of correction from the hand of an angry Father: for, on account of the abuses which obtained among the Corinthians at the Lord's supper, "many were weak and sickly among them, and many had fallen asleep[c]." Not unfrequently were temporal judgments inflicted with an express view to prevent the necessity of inflicting far heavier judgments in the world to come[d].

Now it seems evident that Hezekiah viewed his sickness in this light, namely, as a judgment sent from God on account of some iniquity which he had committed. As the enemies of David said in his sickness, "An evil disease, that is, a disease judicially inflicted, cleaveth fast unto him[e];" and as the enemies of the Lord Jesus accounted him to be judicially "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted[f];" so did Hezekiah judge respecting himself at that time: he thought that God was now "calling his sins to remembrance[g]," and punishing him on account of them.

With such views as these, we cannot wonder that during the continuance of the affliction he should "have great bitterness;" and that in the removal of it he should find such an occasion of joy and gratitude. And it is worthy of observation, that the Psalmist speaks of the removal of temporal judgments from the people of Israel in terms exactly similar to those which Hezekiah uses in reference to his recovery from sickness: "Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob: thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people: thou hast covered all their sin: thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger[h]."

This then shews us why the pious Hezekiah so grievously complained of his sickness, and so earnestly implored a restoration to health. This explains those words of his, "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I twitter; I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail for looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me."]

2. The state of his soul—

[When he complains of God having, "like a lion, broken all his bones," it seems evident, that God had withdrawn from him for a season his wonted consolations, and that he was much in the state of David, who, under the pressure of a dangerous illness, cried, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps: thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves[i]." Whether there

[c] 1 Cor. xi. 30. [d] ib. ver. 32. as also 1 Cor. v. 4, 5.
[e] Ps. xli 8. [f] Isai. liii. 4. [g] 1 Kin. xvii. 18.
[h] Ps. lxxxv. 1—3. [i] Ps. lxxxviii. 3—7.

there was any particular occasion for this dispensation, we are not informed. We know that Job, who was esteemed by God himself "a perfect man," was subjected to a similar trial for his good. And, if this dispensation had no other end than to counteract that propensity to pride which afterwards broke forth, and brought down upon Hezekiah the severest displeasure of the Almighty, it was justly and graciously ordained.

For deliverance from a state like this we wonder not that Hezekiah should bless and magnify the Lord. Who can think of being delivered from the pit of corruption, and not rejoice? Who can contemplate God as having "cast all his sins behind his back," and not bless him from his inmost soul[k]? Consider what is implied in this expression: it imports that "God will remember our sins no more." Once "he set our iniquities before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance[l];" but now he "hides his face from them[m]," "blots them out[n]" from the book of his remembrance, and "casts them into the very depths of the sea[o]," from whence they shall never rise to appear against us in judgment. Verily, if on the receipt of such a mercy as this "he had held his peace, the very stones would have cried out against him."

We must not omit to notice the source to which Hezekiah traces this great deliverance: it is to God's sovereign love and mercy. He does not say, "From a respect to my deserts thou hast done thus;" but, "in love to my soul" thou hast done it. And to this must all spiritual blessings be traced. Whatever mercy God has vouchsafed to us, it is the fruit of "his great love wherewith he has loved us[p]," even of that love which knows neither beginning nor end[q].]

The words thus explained, I shall now proceed to,

II. Improve—

There are two remarks which I will make upon them. They shew us, in a very forcible way,

1. What should be our chief desire under any afflictive dispensation—

[Our great concern usually is to get the affliction itself removed. But judgments may be removed in anger, as well as sent in anger[r]: and God may cease to smite us, only because he is determined not to strive with us any longer, but to give us over to final impenitence[s]. Our first object should be, to inquire of God "Wherefore he contendeth with us[t]?" and then to seek the removal of that sin which God has visited

[k] Ps. ciii. 1—4. [l] Ps. xc. 8. [m] Ps. li. 9. [n] Isai. xliii. 25.
[o] Mic. vii. 18, 19. [p] Eph. ii. 4. [q] Jer. xxxi. 3.
[r] Hos. xiii. 11. [s] Gen. vi. 3. Isai. i. 5. [t] Job x. 2.

visited with his displeasure. If we can fix on no particular sin, which has provoked God to anger, yet we know that there is an immense load of guilt upon our souls: and therefore we should pray as David did, "The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses! look upon mine affliction and my pain, and *forgive all my sins*[u]!"——— Sin, even one single sin, being retained before God's face, will be the heaviest curse that can befall us: but, if our sins be "cast behind his back," the most accumulated trials shall only "augment our eternal weight of glory[x]"———]

2. What exalted happiness we are privileged to enjoy—

[Hezekiah spoke of the forgiveness of his sins as already granted, yea, and manifested also with full assurance to his soul. And this is the common privilege of all Believers. As Isaiah had a live coal from off the altar applied to his lips, with this assurance, "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged;" so have we the promise applied to our souls at this day, "the Holy Spirit of promise sealing them upon our hearts[y]," and thereby becoming to us "a Spirit of adoption, and a witness of our being the children of God[z]." Doubtless there are marks by which these manifestations must be determined[a]——— but it is not by the marks alone that we can attain the consolations here spoken of: these can be imparted only by Him who is emphatically called THE COMFORTER: but the assurance itself is, if not the attainment of all, yet certainly the privilege of all who truly believe[b].

Live not then below your privileges. And, as God generally makes use of afflictions to prepare us for the enjoyment of them, learn to welcome any trials which it may please God to send[c]———

Only, if God cast your sins behind his back, be the more concerned to set them ever before your own face[d]; that your own souls may be the more deeply humbled[e], and that the grace of God may be the more abundantly exalted[f]———]

[u] Ps. xxv. 17, 18. Here a variety of sins may be pointed out, as subjects of self-examination.

[x] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [y] Eph. i. 13. [z] Rom. viii. 15, 16.

[a] 1 John v. 13. & iii. 14. [b] 1 John v. 20.

[c] Rom. v. 3—5. [d] Ps. li. 3. [e] Ezek. xvi. 63.

[f] 1 Tim. i. 12—14.

DVIII.

CHRIST'S CARE FOR HIS SHEEP.

Isai. xl. 11. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

THE holy Psalmist, speaking of Jehovah's care of him, says, "The Lord is my Shepherd:" and then, from the union of the Godhead with the pastoral office, he infers, "Therefore I shall not want[a]." The same incomprehensible union is mentioned by the prophet in the passage before us. The Heralds that proclaimed the advent of the Messiah were commanded to draw the attention of men to him in these words, "Behold your God!" The person thus announced, is further described in the words preceding our text; "Behold! the Lord God will come:" and then it is added, "HE shall feed his flock like a shepherd." Now when it is considered how prone the Israelites were to idolatry, it cannot be conceived that the prophet should speak of the Messiah in such exalted terms, if they did not properly belong to him. But the Prophets generally, and Isaiah in particular, are very full and explicit in declaring, that Jehovah was to become incarnate, and by the sacrifice of himself to redeem and save a ruined world. It is not however of his *person* that we now propose to speak, but of his *office; that* being the particular point to which my text refers: yet it would be improper to pass over such a strong testimony to the Divinity of our blessed Lord, because, in the judgment of all, but more especially of Jews, it must have the effect of silencing every doubt upon that important subject. And it adds no little interest to the description here given of him, when we know, that He who so condescends to minister as a Shepherd to the least and meanest of his flock, is the Most High God: according as it is written, "To us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and his name shall be called, The Mighty God[b]."

The

[a] Ps. xxiii. 1. [b] Isai. ix. 6.

The words which form the ground-work of our discourse, will lead me to set before you,

I. A general view of our Lord as a Shepherd—

The character of a shepherd is frequently assigned to our blessed Lord, in the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament[c]: and every duty pertaining to that office is executed by him:—

1. He gathers them to his fold—

[They are "wandering upon the dark mountains, in a cloudy and dark day[d];" "every one going in *his own* way[e]," and "after the imaginations of his own heart[f]"———The paths of all, though differing from each other according as the age, the inclinations, and the diversified temptations of the different individuals may lead them,———all agree in this, that they are far distant from the ways of God's commandments[g]. But "he searches for them, and seeks them out:" he follows them by the preaching of his word, by the dispensations of his providence, by the mighty working of his Spirit; and, having found them, "he apprehends them" by his pastoral crook[h], and "makes them willing" to return with him[i], and "carries them home upon his shoulders rejoicing[k]"———]

2. He provides for their wants—

[Oh! how sweet are the pastures into which he leads them[l]! Who can express the delight which a converted soul experiences in feeding upon the promises, "the exceeding great and precious promises" of his God?———In comparison of the food provided for the sheep of Christ, all else is but as "husks on which the swine subsist[m]." This is set forth in Scripture under the image of a luxurious feast[n]: and verily it is "a feast of fat things" to all the saints; a feast, on which even the angels themselves might account it a privilege to partake[o]———]

3. He affords them his effectual protection—

[Weak as they are, and beset with many enemies, they are preserved in perfect safety[p]———He who laid down his life for them, will suffer "none to pluck them out of his hand"

[c] Ezek. xxxvii. 24. Zech. xiii. 7. Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. v. 4.
[d] Ezek. xxxiv. 6. [e] Isai. liii. 6. [f] Jer. xxiii. 17.
[g] Rom. iii. 11, 12. [h] Phil. iii. 12. [i] Ps. cx. 3.
[k] Luke xv. 5, 6. [l] Ezek. xxxiv. 14.
[m] Luke xv. 16. Isai. lv. 2. [n] Isai. xxiv. 6.
[o] Ps. lxxviii. 25. [p] 1 Pet. i. 5.

hand[q]"———"They lie down beside the still waters[r]," which are a just emblem of the tranquillity of their own souls———"They are kept in perfect peace, because they trust in him[s]."]

4. He administers to them according to their diversified necessities—

[Amongst them there will be some who are sick, or diseased, or injured by some misfortune: but he knows all their particular cases, and imparts to them the relief which they severally need; "bringing back those which have been driven away, binding up that which has been broken, and strengthening that which is sick[t]"———and never intermitting his care of them, till he has brought them to his fold above[u]———]

But our text requires us to take,

II. A more particular view of him as ministering to the weak and needy—

Let us notice then in a more especial manner,

1. His tenderness to the weak—

[The lambs which have been but recently brought forth, may be supposed incapable of proceeding with the flock to any distant pasture. But these "he will gather with his arms, and carry in his bosom." "He will not despise the day of small things[x]." There is not one in all his flock so weak, but he will pay the most minute attention to its necessities. He who gave so particular a charge to Peter to "feed his *lambs*," and required this of him as a necessary proof of his love[y], will not himself neglect his lambs; but rather will augment his tender assiduities in proportion as the weakness of the lamb calls for more peculiar care: he will even take it up, and "carry it in his bosom." In what an endearing view does this place the character of our blessed Lord!——— How sweetly encouraging is this consideration to those who feel their weakness, and are ready to despond because of it!——— Let us remember, that when his Disciples would have kept persons from troubling him with their little children, he reproved them, and said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven[z]." Whether therefore you be children in respect of your natural or spiritual birth, fail not to come to him, assured, that he will bear with your infirmities, and "perfect his own strength in your weakness[a]"———]

2. His

[q] John x. 11, 28. [r] Ps. xxiii. 2. [s] Isai. xxvi. 3.
[t] Ezek. xxxiv. 16. [u] Ps. xxiii. 5, 6. [x] Zech. iv. 10.
[y] John xxi. 15. [z] Mark x. 14. [a] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

2. His compassion to the afflicted—

[He will have respect to the state of his flock, even as Jacob had, who "would not overdrive them one day, lest they should all die[b]." So our blessed Lord "will gently lead that which is with young." There are amongst his people many who are weary and heavy-laden with a sense of sin, and bowed down greatly by reason of the difficulties of their way. But to the former he sends a special invitation, with an assured promise of rest[c]: and to the latter he authorizes us to declare, that "he will raise them up[d]." In truth, he is pre-eminently distinguished by this, that "he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; but will bring forth judgment unto victory[e]." Consider what is implied in these metaphors: a bruised reed is, according to human appearance, incapable of ever sending forth a melodious sound; and smoking flax has, as it were, but a hidden spark of fire, whilst it is sending forth whole clouds of corruption: yet will Christ fan the expiring spark to a flame, and attune the reed to send forth the most heavenly strains. Let none then despond, however destitute they may be of any thing to encourage them from within; but let them "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might[f]"———]

Let me now ADD a few words,

1. In commendation of this good Shepherd—

[Whence is it that all do not put themselves under his care? Is there any want of love, or tenderness, or power in him? God frequently, by his Prophets, called on his rebellious people to testify against him, and to say, Whether there had been any want of kindness or care in him: "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me[g]." "What could I have done more for my people than I have done[h]?" So do I now, in the name of this good Shepherd, call upon you all this day, to bear, if you can, your testimony against him. Whom did he ever neglect or despise? Whom that sought him, did he ever refuse to receive? Whom that trusted in him, did he ever omit to supply according to his necessities?——— If then no complaint ever was, or could be made against him from the world, let every heart appreciate his excellency, and every soul commit itself to his care———]*

2. For the augmentation and encouragement of his flock—

[You

[b] Gen. xxxiii. 13, 14. [c] Matt. xi. 28. [d] Ps. cxlvi. 8.
[e] Matt. xii. 20. [f] Eph. vi. 10.
[g] Mic. vi. 3. Jer. ii. 5, 31. [h] Isai. v. 4.

* If this were a subject for an *Ordination* or *Visitation* Sermon, the Clergy should be urged to follow the example of this good Shepherd.

[You who have to this hour been going astray, and walking in the way of your own hearts, reflect upon your guilt and danger, and "return now without delay to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls[i]"——— As employed by him, I come now to search you out, and to bring you home to his field[k]——— O think, how delightful it will be to "hear his voice calling every one of you by name[l]," and "going in and out with you" as long as you shall remain in this dreary wilderness[m], and then performing the same office for you in the realms of bliss[n]! "O listen not to the voice of strangers"——— but, follow him——— that you may be one fold under one Shepherd for ever and ever[o].]

[i] 1 Pet. ii. 25. [k] Eph. iv. 11. Mark xvi. 15. Jer. xxiii. 4.
[l] John x. 3. [m] ib. ver. 9. [n] Rev. vii. 17. [o] John x. 5, 9, 16.

DIX.

THE WEAK BELIEVER COMFORTED.

Isai. xli. 10. *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

OF the contest between Jehovah and the worshippers of idols, we who have never witnessed the madness of idolaters, have no conception: and, consequently, the pains taken by Jehovah to vindicate his exclusive right to the worship of his creatures appear almost superfluous. But the pertinacity with which idol-worship was upheld, not only amongst the heathen nations around Judea, but even in Judea itself, rendered every possible effort necessary to withstand its influence, and to suppress its growth. Power and authority were for the most part on the side of idolatry; in support of which the bitterest persecutions were set on foot against the adherents of true religion. But Jehovah promises to them his support, and assures them, that, however severely tried for a season, they shall triumph at last.

This is the primary import of our text. But, when we recollect, that there is a spiritual idolatry still prevalent, and that there still exists the same contest between Jehovah and the votaries of this present world, and that his faithful servants are still greatly obstructed

obstructed in their ways, and painfully persecuted too for their fidelity to him, we shall see that the encouragement in our text is as needful for them, as ever it was for his people of old.

I propose then to set before you,

I. The grounds which the Lord's people have for fear—

The idea of guilt and unworthiness might well come into our view, if we were treating the subject without any reference to the context: but as the fear and dismay mentioned in our text originated only in the power of their enemies, their own inability to withstand them, and the fearful consequences of a defeat, we think it right to confine our observations to those topics.

The Lord's people then have many fears as arising from,

1. The number and power of their enemies—

[It is well known that the world and all its votaries are in direct opposition to the children of God. As Gibeon no sooner made a league with Joshua, than all the kings of Canaan confederated to destroy them; so no sooner does any one enter into covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ and submit to him, than the whole world account him a deserter from their cause, and use all their efforts to bring him back to their standard. Even our dearest friends will be the foremost in this warfare; and "our greatest foes be those of our own household." In confirmation of this assertion, we appeal, not to the Scriptures only, but to fact and experience. Let any man set his face to seek the Lord, and all around him will put themselves in array against him, and employ all the arts of persuasion, ridicule, expostulation, and menace, in order, if possible, to divert him from his purpose. Those who, when he was going on in the ways of sin, never uttered a single word of advice to induce him to flee from the wrath to come, no sooner behold him turning into the way of righteousness, than they express the deepest concern about his welfare, and labour to the uttermost to reclaim him from what they account the most egregious folly———.

In league with them will both the flesh, and the devil be; the one striving by the violence of its in-dwelling lusts, and the other by the subtlety of his devices, to draw him back into that state of guilt and bondage from which he has just escaped*———

Such

* 2 Pet. ii. 18.

Such enemies, so numerous, so subtle, so inveterate, the Christian scarcely knows how to encounter: and the thought of their combined and continual efforts to destroy him, fills him not unfrequently with terror and "dismay"———]

2. His utter inability to withstand them—

[The Christian has no idea of the extent of his own impotency to that which is good, till he comes to exert himself in the ways of God. He then finds, that "without aid from the Lord Jesus Christ, he can do nothing." This oftentimes greatly discourages him: "If," says he, "I have run with footmen, and they have wearied me, how shall I contend with horses[b]?" If I am not able to encounter the least of all my enemies, how can I withstand the united force of all? The discouragements arising from this source are the greater, because they so continually recur. The Christian cannot address himself to any duty, but he is constrained from painful experience to acknowledge, that all his sufficiency to do, or to will, or even to think what is good, is of God alone[c]——— Verily, if it were not that he had hope in God, he would sit down in utter despair———]

3. The dreadful consequence of a defeat—

[Eternity is at stake; an eternity of bliss or woe; of bliss or woe unutterable, and inconceivable: and to those only who overcome will the prize of victory be assigned, even to those who maintain the conflict to the end, and overcome all the enemies of their souls. And how fearful the alternative! how dreadful the thought of dwelling with everlasting burnings! Can a man open his eyes to such a prospect, and not fear? Is it not sufficient to appal the stoutest heart? True indeed, some are borne up above all such fears, and are "assured, that, when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, they have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens:" but all are not so privileged; or rather, all do not so fully attain the enjoyment of their privileges: and to them a doubt or suspicion of their ultimate acceptance with God is a source of the most disquieting apprehension.]

But however great be their fears, they may dismiss them all, when they are informed of,

II. The encouragement here afforded them—

Every difficulty that could harass their minds is obviated in our text, in which all their fears are anticipated, and their wants supplied. God promises them,

1. His presence—

[Were

[b] Jer. xii. 5. [c] Phil. ii. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

[Were we left in the power of our enemies without any friend at hand to help us, we might well fear. But God says to the trembling soul, "Fear not; for I am with thee." Now if but a fellow-creature were with us in a season of difficulty, we should take courage, especially if we knew that he was competent to afford us the protection we desired. How much more then may we be satisfied if Almighty God be with us! In the contemplation of *this*, David says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we *not fear*, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. God is in the midst of us: we shall not be moved. God shall help us, and that right early. The Lord of Hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge[d]."

But if it be said, God may be "with us" as an enemy, or as an indifferent spectator: therefore it is not a mere persuasion of his presence that will satisfy our minds; he further assures his people of,]

2. His care—

[Believers are "his people; and He is their God:" and in this character will he be with them in all their trials. A stranger may see a person injured, and not feel himself sufficiently interested to interpose for his relief: but a husband, or a father, will not so act: he will feel the injury as done to himself; and will make the cause his own. So will God do for his people, who are authorized in all their troubles to say to him, "Arise, and plead thine own cause." "Whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye:" and "his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of those who trust in him:" and every perfection that he possesses will he put forth for their preservation and protection— — —

Yet, as his people are required to exert themselves, and are apt to be discouraged on account of their extreme weakness, he promises them,]

3. His succour—

[We are told that he will "put strength into his people[e]," and "strengthen them with might by his power in their inward man." What then need they to fear, when "the arms of their hands are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob[f]?" The weakest of them all may fearlessly adopt the language of the prophet, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song: he also is become my salvation[g]." Yes; the veriest stripling, with his sling and his stone,

[d] Ps. xlvi. 1, 2, 5, 7, 11. [e] Ps. xxix. 11. [f] Gen. xlix. 24.
[g] Isai. xii. 2.

stone, may go forth against all the Goliaths in the universe, assured of victory: for "he can do all things, through Christ who strengtheneth him."

Yet, because the Christian's enemies are far too strong for an arm of flesh, and he is apt, notwithstanding the strength imparted to him, to be discouraged; God further engages to aid him with,]

4. His co-operation—

[Fear not; for "I will help thee," says God: "I will help thine infirmities[h]." In this expression there is something deserving of especial notice. The term used imports, that when our burthen is so heavy and cumbersome that we cannot with all our exertions support it, God promises that he will take hold of it at the opposite end, and bear it together with us. Be it so then, that our burthen is too heavy for *us:* but is it too heavy for *him* also? "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" "If he be for us, not all the powers of earth and hell combined can with any effect exert themselves against us[i]."]

Still, as long as any thing depends on him, the trembling Believer cannot dispel his fears: and therefore, to complete the consolation afforded him, God assures him of,]

5. His effectual support—

["I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." What can the Believer want more than this; to have the eternal God for his refuge; and to have "underneath him *his* everlasting arms?" "Oh! happy indeed art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of thy help, and the sword of thine excellency[k]?" After this promise, we wonder not at the assurances added to our text, "Behold! all that are incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded; they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. Fear not, *thou worm* Jacob: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small as chaff, so that the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them[l]."]

And now, if, after this, any of you entertain unbelieving fears, let me EXPOSTULATE with you, as himself does—

["I, even I, am he that comforteth you: Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass; and forgettest the Lord

[h] Rom. viii. 26. See the Greek.
[i] Rom. viii. 31.
[k] Deut. xxxiii. 27—29.
[l] ver. 11—16.

Lord thy Maker; and fearest every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor[m]?" Do not so dishonour your Lord and Saviour: but believe him able, believe him willing, to afford you all needful succour, and to "save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him"———]

Yet let me not conclude without adding a few words for the CONVICTION of those who know nothing of such fears as these—.

[They who have never had a fear of their state, are at this moment destitute of any Scriptural hope: for, What can they know of themselves? What can they know of the Christian warfare? What can they know of the Scriptures of truth? They are altogether in darkness even until now. Can it be supposed that God would use such efforts for the encouragement of his people, if they did not need encouragement? Why did Jehovah so tenderly chide his people of old for their fears, and give them such rich promises of aid, if their situation did not require such supports[n]? or why does our blessed Lord still say, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom[o]?" Know of a surety, that the Christian life is attended with many difficulties; and that all the supports and consolations afforded to the Believer in the holy Scriptures, are no more than his necessities require: and, if ever you begin to serve the Lord in truth, you will find the promise in our text more precious to you than gold, and "sweeter to you than honey, or the honeycomb."]

[m] Isai. li. 12,13. [n] Isai. xl. 27—31. [o] Luke xii. 32.

DX.

THE WORM JACOB THRESHING THE MOUNTAINS.

Isai. xli. 14—16. *Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff: thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.*

TO comfort and encourage the weak is among the first duties of a Minister. The command of God to all his servants is, to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and dispel the fears of the desponding,

desponding, with an assurance, that their God will come and save them[a]. This is an office executed by our blessed Lord, who "carries the lambs in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young[b]." The delight which the Father himself also takes in raising up the drooping minds of his people, appears eminently in this, that he frequently addresses them in terms which they, through despondency, would use to characterize themselves; and then under those very characters assures them of his most favourable regards. This is particularly conspicuous in the passage before us, where, addressing his people, he declares,

I. Their character—

[The name of a "worm," as applied to our blessed Lord, denotes his low and abject condition during his abode on earth[c]: but, as applied to us, it rather represents our weakness and insufficiency for any thing that is good. In this sense it does indeed most justly mark our character: for there is no creature less capable of active exertion than a worm, or less able to effect any material good: and certainly our inability to perform that which is good is extreme; for we not only cannot of ourselves *do* a good action[d], but we cannot even speak a good word[e], or think a good thought[f]. God himself must give us both to will and to do[g], and must work all our good works in us[h]. As *rational* Beings, we have yet a considerable portion of the Divine image upon us; but as *moral* agents, "we are very far gone from original righteousness," and are altogether "dead in trespasses and sins;" nor have we any more power to renovate ourselves, than "an Ethiopian has to change his complexion, or a leopard his spots[h]."]

II. Their labours—

[Notwithstanding our utter impotence, we have an immensely difficult work to perform: "the worm Jacob" is required to "thresh mountains," and to reduce them all to dust: though himself liable to be crushed beneath the smallest clod, he must address himself to this mighty task. There were to all human appearance insurmountable obstacles to the progress of the Christian Church, which yet it was destined to overcome: so are there mountains in the way of every individual, which yet he must remove, before he can arrive at the Promised Land. What almost insuperable difficulties does *the world*

[a] Isai. xxxv. 3, 4. [b] Isai. xl. 11. [c] Ps. xxii. 6.
[d] John xv. 5. [e] Matt. xii. 34. [f] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[g] Phil. ii. 13. [h] Jer. xiii. 23.

world present to him! its pleasures, its maxims, its habits, its company, its friendship, its hatred, its fiercest opposition, must all be regarded as a thing of nought———*The flesh* too, with all its affections and lusts, must be mortified and subdued———Yea, *Satan himself*, with all the principalities and powers of hell, must be encountered and overcome[i]——— Alas! who is sufficient for these things? Who that is informed of Demas turning aside through love of this present evil world, and of the great Apostle himself crying, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" must not tremble for himself? But such is the work assigned us; and the weakest amongst us must undertake and execute it, ere he can receive from God the promised recompence of reward.]

III. Their successes—

[Weak as they are, they all prevail at last. As the Jews, notwithstanding all the obstructions of the Red Sea, the wilderness, and the warlike inhabitants of Canaan, obtained at last the full possession of the Promised Land, and as the Christian Church triumphed at last over all the power of the Roman empire, so is every Believer, crowned with victory at last[k]———The hills and mountains are levelled through his unwearied exertions[l]; and he is "made more than conqueror through Christ who loveth him." Through faith he overcomes the world[m]; by the aid of the Holy Spirit he mortifies the deeds of the body[n]; and by a steady and uniform resistance, he overcomes Satan, so that that wicked fiend is constrained to flee from him, and to yield him the palm of victory[o]. The full extent of the triumphs described in our text has never yet indeed been realized in the Church of Christ: we look to a period yet future, when "the mountains shall be as dust, and be scattered as by a whirlwind;" and possibly at that period the triumphs of individuals will be more complete: but even now, by a firm reliance on the promises, we may be enabled to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God[p]." If we had but faith as a grain of mustard seed, we might say to every mountain that is in our way, "Be thou removed; and it should immediately be cast into the depths of the sea[q]."]

IV. Their triumphs—

[With such weakness, and such labours, we might well expect the worm Jacob to sink in dejection and despair: but behold he triumphs and exults, "rejoicing in the Lord, and glorying in the Holy One of Israel." Here it must be remarked,

[i] Eph. vi. 12. [k] Compare Dan. ii. 34, 35. with the text.
[l] Isai. xl. 3—5. [m] 1 John v. 4. [n] Rom. viii. 13. Gal. v. 24.
[o] Jam. iv. 7. 1 John ii. 14. & v. 18. [p] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [q] Mat. xxi. 21.

remarked, that he does not ascribe his successes to his own arm; he does "not sacrifice to his own net, or burn incense to his own drag;" he gives the glory to Him, to whom alone it is due, even to "Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of his faith[r]." The language of David in reference to his victories exactly suits the Christian in reference to his spiritual triumphs[s]. He readily acknowledges whence it is that the weapons of his warfare have accomplished such mighty things, namely, that they have been "mighty *through God*[t]," who "has wrought all his works in him[u]," and "of whom all his fruit has been found[x]." Hence, whilst he acknowledges that "he who hath wrought him to the self-same thing, is God[y]," he shouts with devoutest gratitude, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ[z]!"]

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. The folly of unbelief—

[We are apt to be discouraged by reason of our weakness. But, what if we be as weak as the meanest worm? is God therefore weak, or unable to effect the purposes of his grace? He characterizes us as "worms," on purpose that, "when weak in ourselves, we may be strong in him, and expect him to perfect his strength in our weakness." Instead therefore of being discouraged on account of our weakness, we should rather "rejoice and glory in it, that the power of Christ may rest upon us," and be glorified in us[a]. We should not, like the unbelieving spies, contemplate the power of our enemies, but should, with believing Joshua, regard them all "*as bread for us*[b]:" and, hurling defiance at them all, we should say, "Who art thou, *O great mountain?* Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: his hands shall surely finish the work he has begun[c]."]

2. The need of constant exertions—

[Our weakness is no excuse for inactivity; nor does God's promised aid supersede the necessity of our own exertions. On the contrary, it is that very promise that encourages our exertions[d]. *The mountains must be threshed by our arm:* "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent must take it by force[e]." We must run our race, and fight our fight, and endure unto the end: for it is "to him only that overcometh, that the crown of glory will be given." Give not way then to dejection or sloth, but go forth in the strength of the

[r] Heb. xii. 2. [s] Ps. xviii. 29, 32, 33, 34, 37, 42.
[t] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. & 1 Cor. xv. 10. [u] Isai. xxvi. 12. [x] Hos. xiv. 8.
[y] 2 Cor. v. 5. [z] 1 Cor. xv. 57. & 2 Cor. ii. 14. [a] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.
[b] Numb. xiv. 3, 9. [c] Zech. iv. 7, 8. with Phil. i. 6. [d] Phil. ii. 12, 13.
[e] Mat. xi. 12.

the Lord Jesus: and when difficulties appear to be absolutely insurmountable, then go to him, and remind him of his promise, "I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness[f]." Then you shall find, that "you can do all things through him strengthening you," and that "Satan with all his train shall be shortly and eternally bruised under your feet."]

[f] ver. 10. with the text; and Amos v. 9.

DXI.

CHRIST'S COMMISSION.

Isai. xlii. 5—7. *Thus saith God the Lord; he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.*

"HEAR, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! for the Lord speaketh." In the preceding verses he speaks to *us*, and calls our attention to "his elect servant," whom he had appointed to the office of saving man, and qualified to execute it in a manner honourable to himself, and effectual for that end[a]. But, in the words of our text, we overhear the almighty Jehovah, the eternal Father, addressing his co-equal, co-eternal *Son*. Ineffable mystery! And what a stupendous privilege to be admitted thus into the council chamber of the Most High! Surely if Moses was commanded to put off his shoes because the place where he stood was sanctified by the Divine presence, it becomes us to express the profoundest reverence, while we listen to the God of heaven giving his commission to his only dear Son respecting the redemption of a ruined world.

In this address to Jesus we see,

I. The commission given him—

Though Christ in his own nature is God equal with the

[a] Compare Mat. xii. 15—21. which shews that the whole of this passage relates to Christ.

the Father; yet as man, and as Mediator, he acts as the Father's servant. In this capacity he received a commission,

1. To undertake the work of our salvation—

[The first covenant which was made with Adam, being broken, it pleased God to make a new covenant; not so much with man, as with his own Son in man's behalf[b].

The terms of this covenant were, that Christ should make his soul an offering for sin, and that he should have the souls of men for his reward[c].

Christ was not only a party in this covenant, but also the Mediator and Surety of it[d]. He mediated between God and man; and became a surety, both for God to man, and for man to God. He engaged on man's part, that he should be renewed after the Divine image, and be made obedient to the Divine will; and on God's part he engaged, that his mercy should be extended to every believing penitent.

In this view Christ is said to be given "for a covenant;" because he alone fulfils the conditions of it, and because we, in laying hold on him, become partakers of all its benefits.]

2. To perform it effectually in our behalf—

[Man being blinded by Satan and enslaved by sin, it was necessary that he should be enlightened with divine truth, and liberated from the dominion of his lusts. Accordingly Christ undertook to bring him forth into *light*, and *liberty*. In execution of his office he illuminated the Jewish Church by the revelations made to Moses and the Prophets; and since that period he has been "a light to the Gentiles" also, even to the very ends of the earth. Nor is it only by the outward manifestation of his truth that he instructs the world: he teaches men by his Spirit also: he "opens the eyes of the blind," and causes them to "see out of obscurity and out of darkness." By the same Spirit also he enables them to burst the chains with which they are bound, and to come forth from their dungeons in which they are immured. As in delivering Peter from his prison, where he lay sleeping on the night preceding his intended execution, he caused the light to shine in upon him, and his chains to fall off, and the prison doors to fly open of their own accord[e]; so now he delivers the souls of men, "turning them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God[f]."

All this is Christ's covenanted work: he performs it in consequence of his own engagements: and he will perform it as long as there shall continue one on whose behalf the mighty working of his power shall be necessary.]

In

[b] Gal. iii. 17. Tit. i. 2. Eph. i. 4. [c] Isai. liii. 10—12.
[d] Heb. viii. 6. & vii. 22. [e] Acts xii. 4—10. [f] Acts xxvi. 18.

In the text we notice,

II. His ability to execute it—

We cannot doubt of this, when we are informed,

1. By whom he was called to it—

[The Father gives in this place a glorious description of his own majesty, as the Creator of heaven and earth, yea of man also, with his animal life, his rational faculties, and his immortal soul. Nor is this description without a very important meaning, as introductory to the commission given to his Son; because it shews us by what high authority his Son acted, and how certainly his undertaking shall be effectual for the end designed.

"Christ glorified not himself to become an high priest, but was called of God, as was Aaron." The Father "called him in righteousness." In execution of his own righteous purpose, and in accomplishment of his righteous promises, he gave him this commission. He called him when first he entered into covenant with him; and again, when he provided him a body for the discharge of his office; and again, when by an audible voice from heaven he testified, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

From these repeated calls we are assured, that Christ was fully authorized to undertake our cause, and that in all that he did and suffered for us he was accepted of his heavenly Father.]

2. By whom he was assisted in it—

[The trials which Jesus met with from man, though exceeding great, might have been borne: but when he conflicted with all the powers of darkness, and sustained all the weight of his Father's wrath, he must have sunk under the load, had not his almighty Father supported him. But never did he want effectual aid. He complained of dereliction indeed in his most trying hour: but this dereliction related only to the sensible presence of his Father, whereby he might have been comforted: that which was necessary for his support, was never withdrawn: the Father had said to him, "I will hold thine hand, and will keep thee;" and never for one moment was he forgetful of his promise.

But this promise was not confined to the period of Christ's existence upon earth: it includes also a concurrence with him in his work, even to the end of the world. What then can be wanting, when the Father and the Son are ever combining their efforts for the salvation of men? None, however blind, need to despair of beholding the light; none, however riveted in bonds, need despair of attaining liberty.]

We

We cannot close this subject without suggesting some obvious REFLECTIONS—

1. How deeply are we interested in the covenant of grace!

[It is generally imagined, that the mysterious engagements between the Father and the Son are merely speculative points, in which mankind are little interested. But what can be conceived more interesting than the offices of Christ, or his ability to fulfil them? Would persons destitute of vision, or imprisoned and under sentence of death, feel no interest in the inquiry, whether they could find relief, or whether one professing to offer it were able to fulfil his word? On the covenant of Redemption rests all our hope. If Christ be not authorized to save us, his good will towards us will be to little purpose: if he be not qualified, his endeavours will be all in vain.

Let us then acquaint ourselves with the proper grounds of our hope. Let us consider the parties contracting, and the engagements which they have respectively entered into; and let us lay hold on that "covenant as all our salvation and all our desire[g]."]

2. What encouragement have all to embrace that covenant!

[Are any persons ready to apprehend that they are excluded from it as unworthy? Behold the provisions of the covenant itself! see for whose benefit it is particularly designed! Are we not only in darkness, but blind also? Are we enslaved, and so fast bound in prison that we cannot come forth? We then are the very persons for whose sake the Son of God became incarnate, and for whose relief both his and his Father's honour are mutually pledged.

Let none then listen to such unfounded apprehensions; but rather let every one remember, that Christ is given for a covenant to the whole Gentile world; and that the more desperate our condition be, the more will God be glorified in our acceptance of his proffered mercy.]

[g] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

DXII.

THE SAINTS ARE WITNESSES FOR GOD.

Isai. xliii. 12. *Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.*

GOD is a jealous God, and cannot endure that any other should be put in competition with him. Hence he

he takes frequent occasion to reprove the idolatry into which his people were ever prone to relapse. He shews them the folly of cutting down a tree, and kindling a fire with part of the wood, and roasting their food with it, and then fashioning another part of the same tree into the image of a man, and bowing down to it as a god. He challenges them and all the world to bring any single instance of such senseless idols having ever revealed things that were long past and forgotten, or of their having ever foretold future events, or effected for their votaries any signal deliverance. He appeals to them, that he had done these things for them; and that therefore they themselves were witnesses for him, that he was the only true God.

A similar appeal may properly be made to the people of God at this day. They have within themselves very convincing proofs of his exclusive right to universal adoration;

I. In what he has taught them—

He has given them such views of Divine truth as they could not possibly obtain from any other quarter. He has shewn them,

1. The depravity of their nature—

[Others may profess in words that they are fallen creatures: but who ever learned, from mere study, or the instructions of man, that his "heart was deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?" Who ever *so* learned it, as really to "abhor himself in dust and ashes?"———But God does teach all his people this lesson———and all who have learned it, are *therefore* living witnesses of his almighty power and grace.]

2. The excellency of Christ—

[To compliment Christ with honourable titles is common enough. But who can open a man's eyes, so that he shall "behold the glory of God in *his* face?"———Yet this is done for all the Lord's people. To every one of them "Christ is truly precious"———In this respect therefore they are witnesses that their teacher is the omnipotent Jehovah.]

3. The beauty of holiness—

[However some particular virtues may be admired in the world, the holiness which the Gospel requires is odious in their

their eyes. Penitence is considered as melancholy; devotion, as hypocrisy; zeal for God, as enthusiasm; and an earnest expectation of glory, as consummate pride and presumption. And who can alter their views? Not an Apostle, nor even an angel from heaven. They might be silenced; but nothing less than Omnipotence can so change their sentiments, as to make them in love with a spiritual and heavenly life. But the Child of God sees that such a life is the perfection of bliss, a very heaven upon earth———and herein also is a witness that the God whom he serves is the only true God.]

But the Children of God are also living witnesses of his power and Godhead,

II. In what he has done for them—

We acknowledge the creation to be an evidence that the Maker thereof is God: and so likewise is the work which God hath wrought in his saints.

1. He has created them anew—

[The change that takes place in conversion is not an outward and partial, but an inward and universal change. It is "a new birth," a "renovation of the inward man after the image of God"———But where is the power that can effect this? Let philosophy try her powers; let reason exert herself: "the old man," the corrupt principles of nature, will laugh at them, and defy their utmost exertions———But is not this change actually wrought in thousands? We grant, that in many who have professed to have experienced it, it is but very imperfectly produced; yea, and that many who think it has been wrought in them only deceive their own souls: but all the Apostles were not like Judas; nor are all professors of religion hypocrites. Take then the upright and consistent Christian, and tell me whether any power on earth can produce such a character?———if not, he is a witness for God, that HE alone is worthy of our hope and dependence.]

2. He has elevated them above the world—

[There is among the professors of religion so great a diversity of attainment, and we are so little able to judge respecting the secret experience of their hearts, that we cannot with any certainty form our estimate of the Christian character from what we see around us: we must go to the Inspired Volume, and take *that* as the only standard of Christian experience. Now we know that Christians are *there* represented as "not being of the world, any more than Christ himself was of the world:" and we see *there* examples of persons altogether "crucified to the world," to its cares, its pleasures, and to every thing that is in it. That there are but few Christians in the

the present day who have arrived at the Scripture standard, we confess with grief and shame; and it will be well if many of them do not find themselves awfully mistaken, when they shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ: but the truth is the same, whether few or many experience it; and it is a certain fact, that every Child of God is delivered from the love of this present evil world——and the fewness of those, whose lives correspond with their professions, tends to prove, rather than to disprove, the point we have affirmed. For, where shall we find one person truly elevated above the world, unless amongst those who have been born of God? Some may be found who are dissatisfied with the world, and who from age or other circumstances find no relish for it: but if they were put into a capacity to enjoy the world as they once did, their love of it would be found as strong as ever. We defy the whole world to produce *one*, who by the mere powers of reason has been raised above the world; and this is a decisive proof that the deadness to the world which true Christians experience, is the work of an Almighty arm.]

3. He has filled them with spiritual peace and joy—

[The peace and joy which the unconverted man possesses, will vanish at the prospect of death and judgment: or if under the influences of deluded hopes they retain a confidence, the peace flowing from that confidence is as different from that which is "the fruit of the Spirit," as the ravings of a maniac are from the suggestions of sober reason ——— But the true Christian has "a peace that passeth all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and glorified"——— Whence does he obtain this? Who but God can give it him? or who can take it away, when God has given it him? Here then again is he a witness for God, that *his* power and grace are infinite.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who idolatrously exalt the creature—

[See the challenge given by God himself[n]: produce the people that have obtained from any but Jehovah, either this knowledge, or this experience. We defy the whole universe. "Bring forth your witnesses, that you may be justified: or else hear ye, and acknowledge, that what we have affirmed is truth." The more you examine the pretensions of any who profess to have acquired these things by their own power, the more evidence you will have, that God alone can produce them in the souls of men———]

2. Those who profess to be Christians indeed—

[Remember that it is your duty and office to be "witnesses

[n] ver. 8, 9.

nesses for God." You are to be "as lights in a dark world, and as a city upon a hill." Be then *voluntary* witnesses. Wicked men, and even the devils themselves, are in some sense witnesses for him: they attest, though against their will, that his representations of the human heart are true, and that he is a God of infinite patience, majesty, and power. But you are intentionally to make your light shine before men, and to convince them by the holiness of your lives that "God is with you of a truth." Be also *stedfast* witnesses. You will find many temptations to "put your light under a bushel;" but you must be resolute in glorifying God, whether by life or by death. Further, be also *consistent* witnesses. The world will judge, not by your words, but by your actions: and if they see these to be at variance with each other, they will rather harden themselves in their infidelity, and adduce your testimony as adverse to God. Look to it then that ye walk in all things "holily, justly, and unblameably;" and "that they who are on the contrary part, may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."

Lastly, for your encouragement, think what *witnesses* ye shall one day be for God *in heaven!* How will ye there proclaim and manifest his power and grace! ——— O blessed day! Look forward to it with joy; and prepare for it by increasing zeal in the service of your God.]

DXIII.

GOD'S KINDNESS TO HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xliii. 20. *I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.*

THE mercies of God which are daily, and, as it were, hourly renewed, demand at our hands a constantly increasing tribute of praise and thanksgiving. Former benefits are not to be forgotten: yet it is allowable, and even proper, that those which have been recently vouchsafed to us should so occupy the mind, as, for a time, almost to exclude from our minds the immediate recollection of those which have been formerly bestowed. The prophet Jeremiah says, "Behold, the days come, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but the Lord liveth which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had

I had driven them[a]." Thus in the verses before our text, God says, "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old: behold, I will do a new thing." The particular thing here predicted, is, the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, together with their preservation in the dry and barren wilderness, through which they must pass in their way to Judea. But that deliverance would never have been represented as so superior to that which they had experienced from Egypt, had it not typified a far more glorious redemption, which they were taught to expect through the intervention of the Messiah. *This* it is (even the spiritual redemption by Christ, together with the aids and consolations of the Holy Spirit) to which the text principally refers; and for which, not "the owls and dragons" of the wilderness, but the more stupid and ferocious Gentiles, "shall honour God" for ever.

In discoursing on these words, we shall consider,

I. The designation given to God's people—

The minds of many almost revolt at the very mention of the word "elect," or "chosen." But though we by no means approve of bringing forward the subject of election on every occasion, yet, as it is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures, and strongly asserted in the Articles of our Church, we ought not to pass over it, when it comes plainly and unavoidably before us. The word "chosen" is used in the text,

1. As a term of distinction—

[No one can doubt but that God's people are often spoken of by the term of "God's elect:" the only doubt is, what that term imports. Now all will confess that it imports a choice of nations to the enjoyment of *national privileges*. In this sense God chose the Jewish nation, and took them out from the midst of a people greater and mightier than they, and gave them his statutes and judgments, when all other nations were left to follow their own ways. And this he did, not on account of any merit in them; but purely on account of his own good pleasure, irrespective of any goodness in them, either seen or foreseen[b]. It is no less clear, that the term

[a] Jer. xxiii. 7, 8. [b] Deut. vii. 7, 8. & ix. 4—6.

term is also applied to *individual persons* chosen *to particular situations* of trust and honour. Levi's appointment to the priesthood[c], David's to the government of Israel[d], and Saul's to the apostleship[e], are unquestionable proofs of God's having exercised his own sovereign will in the selection of individuals to posts of temporal dignity; I may add too, of unspeakable spiritual advantage. These things being admitted, it seems strange that any one can doubt, but that the term "elect" denotes yet further a choice of *particular persons to eternal life.* The people of God are not merely called "elect," but are expressly said to have been "from the beginning chosen *unto salvation,* through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth[f]." And for them in particular is heaven reserved; insomuch that "Jesus Christ himself cannot grant heaven to any but those, for whom it was before prepared of the Father[g]."]

2. A term of endearment—

[This seems the more particular view in which the name is given to God's people in the text. Just as, in reference to his dear Son, God says, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, *mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth*[h], so he speaks of his people here, as feeling complacency and delight in them. In many other passages also the term "elect" seems to be used as expressive of the peculiar interest which God takes in all that relates to his believing people: "Who will lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" "Shall not God avenge his own elect?" "For the elects' sake those days (of trouble to Jerusalem) shall be shortened." And, "God will send his angels (at the last day) to gather together his elect."]

But, notwithstanding their dearness to God, we have but too much reason to consider,

II. The straits to which they may be reduced—

It is evidently implied, that as the Israelites in their journey from Egypt must have perished for want of water, if God had not miraculously interposed for their relief; so all his people coming through the wilderness of this world, are at times reduced to difficulties, from whence none but God himself can deliver them. This happens to them by means of,

1. Afflictions—

[The people of God are, for the most part, "a poor and afflicted people." That they have peculiar supports and consolations,

[c] 1 Sam. ii. 27, 28. [d] Ps. lxxviii. 70, 71. [e] Acts ix. 15. Gal. i. 15, 16.
[f] 2 Thess. ii. 13. [g] Matt. xx. 23. [h] Isai. xlii. 1.

solations, we shall soon shew: but inasmuch as they have all the common feelings of humanity, they must find afflictions grievous to them, exactly as others do. Even the most eminent saints have at times been ready to sink under their burthens. Behold David on the death of his rebellious son, Absalom; how bitterly he bewailed his loss[i]! See Hezekiah under the pressure of what he supposed to be an incurable disease; how "he mourned like a dove, and his eyes failed with looking upward[k]!" Thus it is with many under the loss of dear relatives, or the pressure of embarrassed circumstances, or the agonies of an acute disorder: they are ready to faint under their trials, and to be "weary even of life itself[l]."]

2. Persecutions—

Fitly is persecution compared to the scorching heat of the meridian sun. We are told what fatal effects it produces on those who have no root of grace in themselves[m]; and the most stedfast Christians are exhorted to "consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest they should be weary and faint in their minds[n]." Even the apostle Paul himself was sometimes "cast down[o]," and needed peculiar supports from heaven[p]. And though we are not now exposed to all those cruelties which the first Christians endured, yet there are many and heavy trials to be borne, by "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus:" and he must be a faithful labourer, who supports without fainting "the burthen and heat of the day."]

3. Temptations—

[It is not without reason that the weapons with which Satan assaults the Believer are represented as "fiery darts;" for when injected into the soul, they set the whole man, as it were, on fire, and "the poison of them altogether drinks up our spirits[q]." Who has ever known what it is to be haunted with atheistical and blasphemous thoughts; or what, to be harassed with doubts about the truth of Christianity; or what, to be tormented with apprehensions of having committed the sin against the Holy Ghost; who that has ever felt the almost irresistible impulses of corruption, aided by the dreadful workings of despair; who, in short, is in any respect acquainted with the will of Satan, and the depths of his own depravity; and has not been constrained to cry, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me!"?]

But

[i] 2 Sam. xviii. 33. [k] Isai. xxxviii. 10—14.
[l] See Ps. cvii. 5, 10, 18, 26, 27. & xxxviii. 1—8. & xlii. 7. & Job x. 1.
[m] Matt. xiii. 6, 21. [n] Heb xii. 3. [o] 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.
[p] Acts xviii. 9, 10. See also Ps. cxliii. 3—8. [q] Job vi. 4.

But these troubles shall only bring them to the enjoyment of,

III. The mercies reserved for them—

As once God made the rivers and the sea to become dry land, so will he open rivers in the dry and thirsty wilderness. He will supply the wants of his drooping and dejected people: he has treasured up for them an inexhaustible fund of consolation,

1. In the promises of his Gospel—

[What "wells of salvation" are opened in the holy Scriptures! and with what unspeakable joy do thirsting souls "draw water out of them!" A believing application of one single promise to the soul is more reviving, even in the most disconsolate state, than any cup of water can possibly be to one perishing with thirst. Let, for instance, that consoling declaration which was made to Paul, when he complained so bitterly of the thorn in his flesh, and of the buffetings of Satan; let that promise, I say, come home in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, and the very same effects will instantly follow; our tears will be wiped away, and all our complaints be changed into triumphant exultations[r].]

2. In the communications of his grace—

[It is principally with a view to increase and strengthen their graces, that God permits his people to experience so many troubles. He "chooses them in the furnace of affliction," and by means of the fire he "purges away their dross," that they may come forth as gold. Blessed is the testimony which David bears to this truth[s]: and every Believer will esteem his trials most richly recompensed, when he finds that "they have wrought in him an increase of patience, experience, and hope[t]."]

3. In the manifestations of his love—

[Never does God vouchsafe such visits to his people, as when they are suffering for his sake, and in obedience to his will. "He will draw nigh unto them," and "manifest himself unto them, as he does not unto the world," and will give them "the witness of the Spirit, as an earnest of their everlasting inheritance." Thus, if their "afflictions abound *for* Christ, their consolations are made to abound *by* Christ[u]." Now "in the Lord's favour is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life:" when therefore a sense of his "love is shed abroad in

[r] 2 Cor. xii. 9,10. See this further promised, Hos. ii. 14, 15. and exemplified, Ps. xxxii. 2—7.
[s] Ps. cxxxviii. 3.
[t] Rom. v. 3, 4.
[u] 2 Cor. i. 5.

in the heart," it little concerns them by what means so great a blessing has been imparted: whatever they may have endured to prepare them for it, they will not hesitate to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."]

APPLICATION—

[Is there any afflicted soul that cannot find consolation in God? He is only like Hagar, who had a fountain close to her, while she was expecting nothing but death[x]: "let him therefore, though in darkness, stay himself upon his God[y]." Sooner or later, shall all who wait on God be refreshed and comforted[z].]

[x] Gen. xxi. 15—19. [y] Isai. l. 10.
[z] Isai. xl. 27—31. & xli. 17, 18. & xliv. 3. & xlix. 10.

DXIV.

THE OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT PROMISED.

Isai. xliv. 1—5. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.*

THERE is a striking analogy between the things which take place in the natural and in the moral world. As, in addition to the genial warmth of the sun, the showers are necessary to promote the progress of vegetation, so, in addition to the rising of the Sun of Righteousness upon us, the influences of the Holy Spirit are necessary, to soften our hearts, to water the seed that has been sown in them, and to produce in us those "fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." In this the office of the Holy Spirit consists. By his gracious operations on the soul, he applies to men that redemption which Jesus Christ has

has obtained for them; and by his sanctifying power he makes them meet for that inheritance which their Redeemer purchased for them by his blood. Whenever therefore we behold in the Scriptures a promise of the Holy Spirit, we should treasure it up in our minds, and seek not only to understand its import, but also to experience the accomplishment of it in our souls.

In discoursing on the words which we have just read, we shall consider,

I. The glorious promise here given us—

The manner in which the promise is introduced, is particularly deserving of our attention—

[In the last verse of the preceding chapter, the state of Israel is represented as altogether desperate: they were "given up by God to the curse and to reproaches." Nevertheless God would not have any of them to despair; for, if they had but a desire to obtain mercy, he had mercy in reserve for them. He still regarded them as his "servants," whom he had "chosen and formed" for his peculiar people, whom he had helped hitherto, and was still ready to "help" on every occasion that should arise: he calls them by the endearing names of "Jacob, and Israel, and Jesurun;" and bids them to dismiss their fears, and to expect from him all that their hearts could desire.

And is it not in the same way that he addresses *us*? Yes: notwithstanding all the judgments he has denounced against us for our sins, he says, '"*Yet* hear now this, O Jacob my servant;" remember thy relation to me; consider how free and rich has been my grace towards thee, in that I have "formed thee from the womb," and "chosen thee" from all eternity, to be my most favoured servant: put away thy fears: entertain worthy thoughts of thy best Friend: limit not my tender mercies: enlarge thine expectations to the utmost extent of thy necessities; and thou shalt never be disappointed of thy hope.'

It is of great importance to notice the tender and affectionate manner in which God addresses his people; because it is from thence that we collect the most just conceptions of his condescension and grace, and derive the richest encouragement to wait upon him. It is also of great importance to observe what use God makes of the doctrine of election. Twice does he call them his "chosen;" because in that term is contained every thing that is endearing and encouraging. Only let us reflect on the state we were in when he chose us, and

we

we shall see that there is nothing too great for us to expect at the hands of such a gracious God[a].]

But the promise itself is most glorious—

[The gift of the Holy Ghost is that peculiar blessing which the Church in all ages was taught to look for under the Christian dispensation. A measure indeed of the Spirit was vouchsafed to the godly at all times; but the fuller effusion was reserved for the times of the Apostles; as it is said, "The Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified[b]." If we go back as far as to the days of Abraham, we shall find, that the promise of the Spirit was made to him, not so much for his descendants after the flesh, as for his spiritual progeny among the Gentiles, to whom it was fulfilled in the Apostles' days[c]. And the Prophets taught the Jews, in every successive period, to look forward to the same time for the full enjoyment of this privilege. The prophet Joel in particular spoke strongly on this subject: and St. Peter refers to his words, as accomplished on the day of Pentecost[d]. Our blessed Lord also, both before and after his resurrection, instructed his Disciples to expect a more abundant measure of the Spirit than had ever yet been vouchsafed to the world: and to that very instruction of his did St. Peter refer, when the Spirit was first poured out upon the Gentiles[e]. The *measure* in which this blessing was to be imparted to the Church, is also particularly marked in the words of our text: "I will *pour* (not merely *sprinkle*, but *pour*) water upon him that is thirsty, and *floods* upon the dry ground;" even such abundance, as shall be sure to reach the roots, and produce, not a transient change, like that of grass upon the house-top, but a radical and permanent change, both of heart and life.

That we may estimate the change aright, we have it exhibited in two striking images; that of grass, growing up after a season of extreme drought; and that of willows, watered by perennial streams. Here are images familiar to every eye, and calculated to convey a just idea of the effects universally produced by the operations of the Spirit of God upon the soul. A new principle of life begins to shew itself; and a new beauty and excellency to adorn the whole character: the appropriate fruits of every season, and of every condition, are brought forth, and the whole soul appears "as a well-watered garden." *Partial changes* may be produced by *natural means:* but the *supernatural* operation of the Spirit invariably

[a] Ezek. xvi. 3—6. [b] John vii. 39. [c] Gal. iii. 14.
[d] Compare Joel ii. 28, 29. with Acts ii. 1—4, 16—18.
[e] Compare Matt. iii. 11. & Luke xxiv. 49. & Acts i. 4, 5. with Acts xi. 15, 16.

invariably causes a *total* surrender of the soul to God. The unconverted man in his best estate conceives himself to have some right over himself: but the true convert says, yea, and delights to say, "I am the Lord's;" 'I am his rightfully; I am his willingly and deliberately; I am his unreservedly and for ever.' It is for this very end that the Spirit is promised; and these are its effects, wherever that promise is fulfilled.]

Now then let all the house of Israel hear,

II. The duties and privileges resulting from it—

Every promise brings with it correspondent duties as well as privileges: and most assuredly this promise is replete with instruction and consolation,

1. To the Church at large—

[Think of Israel when under "the curse" of God, and overwhelmed by the "reproaches" of their enemies: What comfort must the words of our text have administered to them, especially to all who believed the prophet's testimony respecting them! And shall it afford less comfort to us at this time? Certainly this is a season of lamentable drought, when compared with the Apostolic age. Though God does not leave us altogether without witness, yet the effect of our ministrations is very small and partial. But we look forward to a period, yea, and we hope that the clouds are even now gathering, when the Spirit shall be poured out again, and "showers of blessings" descend upon our thirsty land[f]. We look for the time, when the Church, which is now but as a slender plant, shall become a tree, in whose branches the "fowl of every wing shall lodge[g]." Then shall converts be "as the morning dew;" they shall fly in immense multitudes "as a cloud," and with the speed and velocity of "doves to their windows[h]." The Church itself will be perfectly astonished at the vast increase of her members[i]; for "a nation shall be born in a day:" the most dreary regions of the earth shall, equally with ourselves, participate the blessing; and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." O what joy should such glorious prospects afford us! Did Abraham rejoice when he obtained but a glimmering view of the day of Christ; and shall not we, who have already seen him risen on our horizon, and behold him now rapidly advancing to his meridian height? Was the birth of Jesus announced by angels as "glad tidings of great joy to all people;" and shall not his universal reign, now speedily approaching, be hailed with joy? Yes; blessed be God! we not only "see the cloud of the bigness of a man's

[f] Ezek. xxxiv. 26.
[g] Ezek. xvii. 23. Mark iv. 31, 32.
[h] Ps. cx. 3. Isai. lx. 8.
[i] Isai. xlix. 18—21.

man's hand," but we behold the commencement of those showers, which shall refresh and fertilize the whole earth.]

2. To the weak and disconsolate in particular—

[What mercy can be in reserve for me, may one say, who am "given over to the curse of God, and to the reproaches" of my own conscience? Were I like "the earth that drinketh in the rain, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, I might hope for a blessing from God: but bearing, as I do, only briers and thorns, I am rejected, and nigh unto cursing; and my end is to be burned[k]." But what room is there for such desponding apprehensions, when we contemplate the state of Israel as described in the preceding chapter[l], and in the very words of our text? The "thirsty and the dry ground" is that to which the promise is made: and who may not find his character designated by those terms? But if these be not sufficiently humiliating, to warrant our hope of an interest in the promise, let us reflect on the description of persons for whom our blessed Saviour, on his ascension to heaven, received the gift of the Holy Ghost: it was "for *the rebellious*, that the Lord God might dwell among *them*[m]." Surely the most self-condemning person in the universe may venture to place himself in that class, and consequently to expect under that character what he could not venture to hope for as promised to *the righteous*. And, if a very extraordinary measure of grace be thought necessary for *us*, more than for others, we may surely find a sufficiency in the "*floods*" which are contained in the promise before us. Fear not then, whoever thou art; for God has said, that the poorest, even in the most destitute and desponding state, shall, on looking to the Saviour, have floods and fountains of grace, unbounded in their measure, irresistible in their efficacy, and endless in their duration[n].]

3. To parents more especially—

[The covenant made with Abraham, was made with him and with his seed[o]; and this very promise, which holds forth to us the chief blessing of that covenant, is expressly said to be "unto us, and to our children, and to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call[p]." Let not any then be satisfied with having it fulfilled to themselves alone: let all consider the interest which their children also have in it; let them plead it with God in behalf of their offspring: and let them remember, that, whatever measure of grace they themselves possess, it is given them, not for their own good only, but "for the good of their children after

[k] Heb. vi. 7, 8. [l] Ch. xliii. 26. [m] Ps. lxviii. 18.
[n] Isai. xli. 17, 18. [o] Gen. xvii. 7—9. with Isai. lix. 21.
[p] Acts ii. 38, 39.

after them[q]." O Parents, bear in mind, that the gift of the Spirit is more to be desired in behalf of your children than thousands of silver and gold: let it be your daily prayer, that they may be endued with this precious gift: and, whilst you look for their growth in bodily stature and intellectual attainments, look to see them "growing up as willows by the water-courses," and manifesting to all around them, how richly they are watered by the grace of God. That there is a great neglect of these things amongst religious professors, is but too true; but if the grace of God really exist in us, it will shew itself by an unwearied solicitude for the welfare of our offspring; as the prophet clearly intimates, when he says of the converts in the latter day, "They shall bring their sons in their arms, and their daughters (in litters) upon their shoulders[r]." O that every mother might be as Hannah, and every father as Abraham[s]! and that none of you would "give rest unto your God[t]," till you have prevailed, like wrestling "Jacob[u]," and constrained him, as it were, to "shed forth his Holy Spirit abundantly upon your offspring through Jesus Christ our Saviour[x]!"]

4. To young people, above all—

[Of whom is it said, that they shall, with such zeal and unanimity, devote themselves to God, and glory in the appellation of his people? Is it not of the young, who are springing up as willows by the water-courses? See then what is the first duty, and the highest privilege, of the young! and see what all young people will do, as soon as they have "received the grace of God in truth!" And are there none amongst you who feel your obligations to God for the gift of his only dear Son to die for you? are there none so penetrated with his redeeming love, as to say in the fulness of your hearts, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" Come then to the table of the Lord, and surrender up yourselves to him there! Think it not too early to wait upon him in that ordinance: if you truly desire to be the Lord's, that is the ordinance at which in a more especial manner the surrender of yourselves to him should be made; and in that ordinance you may confidently expect that the Lord will more especially accept and bless you. In that ordinance too you form a closer union with the people of the Lord, who will delight to see you added to their society, and to help you forward by their counsels and their prayers. Come then, and "subscribe with your hand unto the Lord;" or rather, as soldiers, and slaves, and idolaters were used to *inscribe*

[q] Jer. xxxii. 39.
[r] Isai. xlix. 22.
[s] 1 Sam. i. 22—28. Gen. xviii. 19.
[t] Isai. lxii. 7.
[u] Hos. xii. 4.
[x] Tit. iii. 5, 6.

inscribe on their flesh, in some indelible characters, the name of the General, or the master, or the idol, whom they served; so do you get inscribed on your heart, and on your arm, the name of your adorable Saviour, and give yourselves up to him in "a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten[y]."]

[y] Jer. l. 4, 5. 2 Cor. viii. 5.

DXV.

THE FOLLY OF SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY.

Isai. xliv. 20. *He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?*

WE who have lived under the light of revelation, and have been instructed in the knowledge of the one true God, are amazed at the stupidity of the Heathen, who form idols of wood and stone, and worship gods which they themselves have made. But we do not consider, that it is not the *forming* of these images, but the *trusting in* them, that makes them gods: and that we ourselves are guilty of idolatry as much as the heathen themselves, if in any respect we "love and serve the creature more than the Creator[a]." *This* is the essence of idolatry; as the Apostle tells us; "Beware of covetousness, which is idolatry[b]." And of persons addicted to sensual enjoyments, he says, they "make a god of their belly[c]:" and Christians universally, being in danger of indulging an undue confidence in, or attachment to, the creature, are guarded against those evils in these very expressive terms, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols[d]." In speaking therefore of idolaters, it is not necessary that we carry you back to the prophet's days, or that we take you amongst Pagans of the present day: the language in our text is quite as applicable to us at this time as to any of them. With a view therefore to spiritual idolaters amongst ourselves, I will shew you,

I. The folly of their ways—

Of every one amongst them it may truly be said, "He

[a] Rom. i. 25. [b] Col. iii. 5. [c] Phil. iii. 19. [d] John v. 21.

"He feedeth on ashes:" for, whatever the things be with which he seeks to satisfy his desires, they are,

1. Unsuitable—

[It is needless to say, how unsuitable ashes are for the food of the body: but they are not a whit less so than the things of this world are for the nourishment of the soul. The soul is a spiritual substance, and must be fed with that which is spiritual. It was formed for God: and nothing but what comes from God, and leads to God, can support it. The word of God, for instance, is food on which it may subsist: and hence "the new-born babe desires the unadulterated milk of the word, that he may grow thereby[e]." On this the saints of old subsisted: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart[f]." The presence of God also is that which strengthens the believing soul: "for that it hungers and thirsts, even to see his power and glory, as they are revealed in the sanctuary: and, when a sense of his loving-kindness is imparted to it, the soul is filled as with marrow and fatness, and praiseth him with joyful lips[g]." In a more particular manner the Christian is nourished by the flesh of Christ and the blood of Christ; on which he feeds continually, and which he finds to "be meat indeed, and drink indeed[h]." As for the things of time and sense, they are but as husks which the swine eat of: and to attempt to feed on them, is only to "feed upon the wind[i]," and to "fill the belly with the east wind[k]."]

2. Unsatisfying—

[To all who go to the creature for happiness, the prophet says, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness[l]." In confirmation of the reproof here given, I will venture to appeal to all, even to those who have drunk deepest of the cup of pleasure, and feasted themselves most largely with carnal delights; Has any thing that you have ever enjoyed, afforded you permanent satisfaction? "Was your eye ever satisfied with seeing, or your ear with hearing?" or, "Was any man that loved silver, ever satisfied with silver[m]?" There is but one testimony on this head, from every Child of man. Vanity is written upon all human enjoyments; and vexation invariably follows the pursuit of them.]

3. Injurious—

[As

[e] 1 Pet. ii. 2. [f] Jer. xv. 16. Ps. cxix. 103. [g] Ps. lxiii. 1—5.
[h] John vi. 53—55. [i] Hos. xii. 1. [k] Job xv. 2. [l] Isai. lv. 1. 2.
[m] Eccl. v. 10.

[As ashes, if taken into the stomach, would soon injure the constitution of the body, so all endeavours to satisfy the soul with carnal enjoyments will of necessity deprave and vitiate all its faculties. Such food will indispose the soul for every thing that is spiritual and divine: it will weaken all its energies; and debase all its powers; and reduce it to the lowest possible state of degradation, causing it to nauseate every thing which God has ordained for its good, and to affect every thing which will tend to its destruction. Every day that a man lives to himself and to this present world, he departs farther and farther from God, and renders himself more and more incapable of heavenly pursuits and heavenly enjoyments. He is "a sinner against his own soul[n];" and is fitly represented as "wronging his own soul, and loving death[o]."]

But to what shall we look as,

II. The source of their errors—

It is not from any radical defect in their understanding that this idolatry proceeds: it comes from their *heart:* "a deceived heart hath turned them aside." This is a point which is by no means duly considered. If the subject of idolatry be brought fairly before a heathen, he sees at once that his god cannot help itself, and consequently can much less afford any help to him. And in like manner the spiritual idolater, if only he will candidly examine the matter, must see, and be convinced, that a vain world can never satisfy an immortal soul. But,

1. His heart is deceived by Satan—

[Satan is the great deceiver of mankind. He puts a gloss on every thing; representing as desirable that which is in itself evil; and hiding the deformity of it; and assuring us, that no painful consequences will follow a compliance with his suggestions. Thus he beguiled Eve in Paradise: and thus he still deceives the children of men, over the face of the whole earth. "He was a lying spirit in all the prophets of Ahab[p]:" and he has his agents in every place, who are ready by every possible means to forward his delusions. He can, and often does, "assume the form of an angel of light[q]:" and not unfrequently urges his temptations in so specious a way, as "to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect[r]." In a word, so subtle are his devices, that to know them, and be aware of them, is a science which scarcely any human

[n] Numb. xvi. 38. [o] Prov. viii. 35, 36. [p] 1 Kin. xxii. 22.
[q] 2 Cor. xi. 13—15. [r] Matt. xxiv. 24.

human being is able to attain[a]; so innumerable are his wiles, and so unsearchable his deceits.]

2. His deceived heart turns aside his whole man—

[The heart, beguiled thus, and vitiated with evil propensities, blinds his understanding, biasses his will, and carries him forward in ways, which a more dispassionate view of things would lead him to condemn. This distinction clearly appears in the two verses preceding our text: "They have not known, nor understood: for God hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And *none considereth in his heart*, neither is their knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire, &c. and shall I make the remains thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?" Then it is added, "He feedeth on ashes; *a deceived heart hath turned him aside.*" The blindness in his understanding arises from a want of due and unbiassed consideration in the heart. And, in fact, all evil will be found to originate here. "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil[t];" and it is "deceitful above all things, as well as desperately wicked[u]:" and, like a bias in a bowl, even when under any strong impulse a man has been going for a season in a right direction, it draws him gradually aside, and causes him to rest in a situation far distant from that at which he aimed. Who amongst us has not had abundant experience of this in his own soul? Who amongst us has not been drawn from complying with the dictates of a better principle, by the more powerful influence of an evil principle within him; and thus followed the less proper course, at the very time that he beheld and approved the better[x]? Thus it is with all the votaries of this world: they have an internal consciousness that their ways and their doings are not good: they therefore will not bring them to the test of God's revealed will: "they are afraid of coming to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved[y]:" yet, through the deceits of Satan and their own hearts, they say, "We shall have peace, notwithstanding we walk in the imagination of our own hearts[z]." Thus, I say, it is with them: they are "carried away by *a spirit of whoredom*[a]:" they are drawn away of their own lust, and enticed. Then, when their lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death[b]."]

Hence we may easily account for,

III. The strength of their delusions—

"They cannot deliver their souls"—

Truly;

[a] 2 Cor. ii. 11. [t] Eccles. ix. 3. [u] Jer. xvii. 9. [x] Rom. vii. 23.
[y] John iii. 19, 20. [z] Deut. xxix. 19. [a] Hos. iv. 12. [b] Jam. i. 14, 15.

[Truly, as our Liturgy well expresses it, they "are tied and bound with the chain of their sins." The whole generation of ungodly men are "led captive by the devil, at his will[c]," and are "carried away to their idols, even as they are led[d]." Amongst them all there are few, if any, who have not felt at times some desire to liberate themselves from their thraldom, and formed some purpose to turn unto their God. But they have not been able to effect it: their inward lusts have been too strong for them, and their deep-rooted habits too inveterate; so that "they could no more change their course of life, than an Ethiopian could change his skin, or a leopard his spots[e]." Their good desires have perhaps been renewed from time to time; but have soon vanished again; "their goodness being only as a morning cloud, or as the early dew that passeth away[f]." In a time of sickness possibly, and at the expected approach of death, they may appear to have gained the victory over their corruptions. But no resolutions of theirs have been found sufficient. Returning health has brought with it renewed temptations; and these have borne down all their purposes, which have snapped asunder, as the cords or withs with which Sampson was bound: and the poor devotees of this world have returned again to their idols, "as a dog to his vomit, and as a sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire."]

"They cannot even say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

[Even to consider their ways with any seriousness, is an effort beyond their power. I mean not that they are under any *natural* incapacity for this; but such is their *moral* weakness, and such the strength of their corrupt nature, that they *cannot* do what their better judgment would dictate. If they attempt to read or pray, their minds start aside from the employment, "even as a deceitful bow[g]:" and their thoughts quickly rove to the very ends of the earth. It is said of Satan, that, "as a strong man armed, he keepeth his palace, and his goods are in peace[h]." And this is verified in experience: for he keepeth his vassals from considering their bondage; he suggests to them that they will have some more convenient season for such unwelcome reflections; and he thus induces them to "think only of peace and safety, till sudden destruction come upon them[i]," and they "perish without a remedy[k]." One would indeed scarcely conceive it possible that rational and immortal Beings should be so insensible in the midst of their dangers, and against all the dictates of their better

[c] 2 Tim. ii. 26. [d] 1 Cor. xii. 2. [e] Jer. xiii. 23.
[f] Hos. vi. 4. [g] Ps. lxxviii. 57. Hos. vii. 16.
[h] Luke xi. 21. [i] 1 Thess. v. 3. [k] Prov. xxix. 1.

better judgment: but so it is: they are willingly deceived, and are therefore "given over to a delusion to believe their own lie[l]:" and so "vain are they in their imaginations, and so darkened in their foolish hearts[m]," that to bid them examine whether they have not a lie in their right hand, is as great an offence to them, as it would be to a poor, blind, infatuated heathen.].

INFER,

1. How thankful should we be for a Saviour!

[If God had not "laid help for us upon One that is mighty," who amongst us could ever be saved? Blessed be God, if there is "a strong man armed that has enslaved us, there is a stronger than he, that has overcome him, and taken from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils[n];" and at this moment sends his servants to proclaim, in his name, "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound[o]." The very first sermon which he himself ever preached on earth was to this effect[p]. In his name therefore I now "preach the acceptable year of the Lord," even the year of Jubilee, wherein every slave may assert his liberty, and claim the possession of his forfeited inheritance. Rejoice then, Brethren, in these glad tidings: and now "cast your idols to the moles and to the bats." Feed no more on ashes: let not a deceived heart any longer turn you aside: but deliver your souls; and come forth into the light and liberty of the children of God. If your past idolatries have involved your souls in guilt, there is a sufficiency in the blood of Christ to cleanse you from it[q]: if your corruptions appear so inveterate that you cannot hope to subdue them, "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for you[r]." Only seek henceforth your all in him, and "you shall be saved by him with an everlasting salvation: you shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end[s]."]

2. How watchful should we be against the remains of our corrupt nature!

[Whilst we are in this world, we still carry about with us "a body of sin and death," and many corrupt propensities, against which we must be ever on our guard. We are but "in part renewed." "The flesh still lusteth against the spirit, as well as the spirit against the flesh[t]." And Satan has still power to tempt us, yea, and "will sift us all as wheat," if our blessed Lord do not interpose for our help. We see in Demas, how prone the carnal heart is to relapse into the love of earthly things; and we know very little of ourselves, if we have not learned, by our own manifold backslidings, that we are

[l] 2 Thess. ii. 11. [m] Rom. i. 21. [n] Luke xi. 22.
[o] Isai. xlix. 9. [p] Luke iv. 18, 19. [q] 1 John i. 7.
[r] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [s] Isai. xlv. 17. [t] Gal. v. 17.

are yet in danger of "turning back unto perdition[u]," and of "losing all the things which we have wrought[x]." I would say then, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation[y]:" "and take to you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand[z]"———]

[u] Heb. x. 38, 39. [x] 2 John ver. 8. [y] Matt. xxvi. 41.
[z] Eph. vi. 12, 13.

DXVI.

REDEMPTION A GROUND OF JOY.

Isai. xliv. 23. *Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.*

IF the word of God produced its full effect upon the hearts of men, this world would be very much assimilated to heaven: there would be the same views, the same dispositions, the same exercises and employments amongst our fallen race, as are found amongst the angels, in the presence of their God. Let us only conceive that the subjects in the text universally occupied the minds of men; and that they were celebrated by all ranks of people with the ardour and affection suited to their importance; surely we should have a very heaven upon earth! Permit me then to remind you, that,

I. "The Lord hath redeemed his people"—

The redemption of the Jews from Babylon was a great and joyful event. The person who was to effect it was foretold by name. The manner in which he should take the city of Babylon (by turning the course of the Euphrates, and passing through the gates of brass), and the use which he should make of his triumph (by liberating the captive Jews, and ordering them to rebuild their city and Temple), was all distinctly specified, above two hundred years before such a person as Cyrus existed in the world[a]. But, extraordinary as this event was, it was only a shadow

[a] ver. 26—28. & Ch. xlv. 1—4.

shadow of one infinitely more important,—the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. He has redeemed his people,

1. By price—

[In a figurative sense, God may be said to have "given Egypt and Ethiopia as the ransom of Israel[b]." But what is the "ransom that he has found for us[c]?" What is "the price with which he has bought us[d]" out of the hands of sin and Satan? Kingdoms and worlds were insufficient for the purpose. We could not be "redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but only with the precious blood of God's co-equal Son[e]." Great as the price was, God did not hesitate to lay it down: "he purchased the Church with his own blood[f]." No longer can we now be detained in bondage, if we claim our liberty in the name of Christ. The law cannot condemn us[g]; "Satan cannot lead us captive[h];" "sin cannot have dominion over us[i]." If we avail ourselves of "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," we shall be "delivered from every kind of bondage, and be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God[k]." "Being made free by Christ, we shall be free indeed[l]!"]

2. By power—

[The deliverances vouchsafed to the Jews of old were effected by "a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm." And it is only "in the day of God's power that any are made willing[m]" to embrace the salvation offered them in Christ Jesus. The "report of the Gospel is believed by those only, to whom the arm of the Lord is revealed[n]." To rescue a soul from the tyranny of sin and Satan, is a work of omnipotence. Easy as it may seem to persuade a person to believe in Christ, it far surpasses the ability of any created being. "God himself must bring us to this self-same thing[o];" and we are told, that, in the accomplishment of this work, he exerts no less power, than he did when he raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, above all the principalities and powers, whether of heaven or hell[p]. Redemption is prepared for us before we come into the

[b] Isai. xliii. 3. [c] Job xxxiii. 24. [d] 1 Cor. vi. 20.
[e] 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. [f] Acts xx. 28. [g] Gal. iii. 13.
[h] Luke xi. 22. [i] Rom. vi. 14. [k] Rom. viii. 21.
[l] John viii. 36. [m] Ps. cx. 3. [n] Isai. liii. 1.
[o] 2 Cor. v. 5. [p] Eph. i. 19—21. The original in ver. 19. shews that the Apostle laboured to the utmost to express his ideas, which were too big for utterance. Τίς ἡ δυνάμις might have sufficed: but to that he adds μέγεθος; and to that ὑπερβάλλον. Because all this was inadequate to convey his mind fully, he accumulates

the world: but, in order to enjoy its benefits, we must, each in his own person, experience the mighty working of God's power: He who "spoiled principalities and powers upon the cross," must triumph over them in our hearts; and incline us, by the effectual operation of his Spirit, to embrace the salvation which he purchased with his blood.]

God has not only thus consulted our happiness, but,

II. Herein "he has also glorified himself"—

Every work of God's hands bespeaks his wisdom, his power, and his goodness: but the work of Redemption glorifies all his perfections. We might easily shew how his justice and his holiness are illustrated by it, and how they are made to harmonize with truth and mercy: but we shall content ourselves with shewing, that herein he has glorified,

1. His grace and mercy—

[Consider only the state in which we were, when God sent his only dear Son to redeem us; and the state in which we are found, when he sends his Holy Spirit to apply that redemption to us: we were fallen after the example of the apostate angels; yet God passed by them, and delivered up his own Son for us: we are still "enemies to God in our minds by wicked works," and are actually fighting against God with all our might; and yet does he subdue us by "the rod of his strength," and make "his Gospel to be the power of God to the salvation of our souls." And must we not stand amazed at this difference which is put between us and the fallen angels? must we not adore that sovereignty which "chose us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world[q]," and in due season exalts us to thrones of glory; yea, which in many instances favours the vilest of publicans and harlots in preference to learned Scribes and self-applauding Pharisees[r]? We are told indeed, that God designed by his Gospel to display "the exceeding riches of his grace[s]:" and this end is thoroughly accomplished: for wherever the Gospel is received, it invariably magnifies his grace in the eyes of men: "Why didst thou choose *me*, Lord? Why was I made to comply with thine invitations, while so many were suffered to decline them, and to perish in

lates other terms; κατὰ τὴν ἰσχὺν—κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς ἰσχύος—κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν κ.τ.λ. Having thus multiplied his terms to the uttermost, and pressed into his service the strongest word that the Greek language could afford him, he repeats it; ἣν ἐνήργησεν. What light does this cast upon the subject before us!

[q] Eph. i. 4. [r] Matt. xxi. 31. [s] Eph. i. 6, 7. & ii. 7.

in their sins?" Scarcely the gift of Christ himself will furnish matter for more admiration and gratitude in heaven than this: or rather, I should say, the greatness of the gift, and the sovereignty with which it is bestowed, will be interwoven with each other in everlasting hallelujahs.]

2. His truth and faithfulness—

[The redemption given us in Christ was a subject of prophecy, as well as that which was vouchsafed to the Jews through the instrumentality of Cyrus. And when Christ was sent into the world, the truth and faithfulness of God were most conspicuously displayed. Of these, the aged and inspired priest more particularly expressed his admiration; repeatedly blessing and praising God for "performing the promises made by the mouth of his holy Prophets, and remembering the oath which he had sworn to our father Abraham[t]." Nor is the truth of God to be noticed only in sending us a Redeemer: it is equally visible in applying redemption to our souls. There is not one that ever partakes of this redemption but in consequence of his having been "given to Christ" before the foundation of the world[u]: nor is one brought finally to the complete enjoyment of it in heaven, but his continued preservation through all his perils and conflicts is an accomplishment of that promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee[x]." Surely at the end of our journey we shall take the same review as Joshua did in his last moments; we shall adore the faithfulness of God, and say, "Of all the good things which God hath promised me, not one thing hath failed[y]."]

Is the glory of God so blended with the happiness of man? Surely,

III. This is a ground of most exalted joy to the whole creation—

All, both in heaven and earth, are required to rejoice in it—

[Even the angels who never fell have reason to rejoice in this great event, because by means of it they have brighter discoveries of God's character, and more enlarged views of his perfections. Indeed they no sooner beheld its accomplishment in the incarnation of Christ, than they sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" and from the moment that Christ had completed his work, and was seated at the right hand of God, they commenced a new song, ascribing glory to the Lamb, as well as unto Him who sitteth upon the throne[z].

But

[t] Luke i. 68, 70, 72, 73. [u] John xvii. 6. 2 Tim. i. 9.
[x] Heb. xiii. 5. [y] Josh. xxiii. 14. [z] Rev. v. 12, 13.

But it is to *men* more especially that the Gospel is "tidings of great joy[a]." They are the persons more immediately interested in it: nor is there "a tree in the whole forest" of the universe, "from the cedar to the hyssop," that ought not to "break forth into singing, and shout for joy." Let those who are most elevated in rank and dignity consider, what source of joy the whole world affords them in comparison of this. Do they admire wisdom? "In this are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge[b]." Do they find gratifications in wealth and honour? What can ever enrich or ennoble them like the Gospel of Christ, by which they become children of God, and heirs of his kingdom? Let the poor also, who merely vegetate, as it were, in obscurity, let them remember that they are "plants of the Lord's planting[c]," and that they are as much interested in redeeming love as any people upon earth. Methinks, the less they have of carnal joy, the more they should seek to rejoice in God. Indeed they are as much distinguished above the rich in respect of spiritual privileges, as the rich are above them in the vanities of this world[d]. What God therefore has chosen for them, let them choose also for themselves.]

Moreover their joy should be proportioned to the occasion for it—

[A cold or languid expression of gratitude would be utterly unsuited to the mercy vouchsafed unto us. It calls for all the powers of our souls; yea, "all that is within us should bless God's holy name[e]." If we would form a just idea of the state in which we should be, let us imagine ourselves, not merely condemned, but already "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire:" How should we *then* hear the tidings of redemption? How would the fallen angels rejoice to see the gates of hell opened to them, and to have an offer of immediate restoration to the felicity of heaven? How would every one break forth into singing! What shouts of joy would echo through the vast expanse of hell! Precisely thus ought we to be affected with the deliverance that is proclaimed to us. We are told that when Titus Flaminius, the Roman General and Proconsul, caused liberty to be proclaimed in the Theatre to the States of Greece, the people with one consent rent the air with their acclamations, extolling him as their greatest benefactor, and crying, A saviour! a saviour! How much more reason have we to exalt our adorable Benefactor, who has "redeemed us to God by his blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his Father[f]!" Let us then sing, and shout for joy. Let the "*mercy* and *truth*" which God has manifested

[a] Luke ii. 10. [b] Col. ii. 3. [c] Isai. lxi. 3.
[d] Jam. ii. 5. [e] Ps. ciii. 1. [f] Rev. i. 5, 6. & v. 9.

manifested in this redemption, be the especial subjects of our praises. Thus shall we be prepared to join the heavenly choir, and to sing hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever.]

[s] Ps. xcviii. 3. This whole psalm is exactly suited to the occasion.

DXVII.

GOD'S CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xlvi. 3—5. *Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: and even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. To whom will you liken me?*

THAT men who know nothing of the One true God should form to themselves idols to represent imaginary gods, is not so much to be wondered at: because every Child of man feels himself dependent on some superior Being, though of the nature or character of that Being he has no distinct conception. But that persons who have been instructed in the knowledge of Jehovah, and been themselves eye-witnesses of his mighty works, should have any disposition to renounce him, and to place their dependence on idols of wood and stone, is utterly unaccountable, on any other principle than that of man's total depravity, and radical alienation of heart from God. But such is the fact: man is prone to idolatry: his "carnal mind is enmity against God:" and from the time of the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt to the time of their captivity in Babylon, not all the judgments or mercies with which they were visited from time to time could keep them from indulging their favourite propensity. One would have thought that the very things which they had seen, even the deportation of the Babylonish idols by the hands of their enemies, should have been sufficient to convince them, that nothing formed by mortal hands could save a man. The prophet, in Jehovah's name, here appeals to them respecting this:

See

See, says he, what helpless things those idols are! "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth: their idols (unable to move themselves) were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle; your carriages were heavy loaden with them; *they were a burthen to the weary beast;* and are *themselves gone into captivity*[a]." But how different from them am I! says Jehovah: *They* are carried by their votaries, yea, and by their enemies too, incapable of resistance or of motion: whereas *I* carry my people: I have carried them from the very womb; and I "will carry them to hoar hairs," even to the latest hour of their lives.

That we may enter more fully into this description which Jehovah gives of himself, let us consider,

I. What he has done for his people—

Jehovah addresses his people here as his children; and brings to their minds what he had done for that whole nation in the wilderness. He had borne them in his arms as a father does his child—

[In the wilderness, when the people were required to march, it must of necessity happen that many females were not in a condition to carry their new-born infants, and more especially as the journeys were often of long continuance. Hence the fathers are represented as carrying their children[b]: and under this character God represents himself as having carried them[c]. Now the whole nation at that time were precisely in the state of little infants; as ignorant of the way which they were to go; as incapable of providing sustenance for themselves; as unable to protect themselves from enemies, or from a variety of dangers to which they were exposed. They needed in every respect Jehovah's care, as much as a new-born infant the attention of its parents. And all this care did God bestow upon them. From the first moment of their departure from Egypt, he went before them in the pillar and the cloud; he sought out for them the places where they should encamp; he regulated all their motions; he supplied them with bread from heaven, and with water from the rock; he delivered them from every enemy; and carried them in perfect safety for the space of forty years. They were cast upon him, as it were, from the womb; and from the womb he thus administered to them with parental care and tenderness.]

And in this way he still carries in the the true Israel—

[The

[a] ver. 1, 2. [b] Numb. xi. 12. [c] Deut. i. 31.

[The nation of Israel typically represented those, who, as Believers in Christ, are in a spiritual sense the Children of Abraham. And these, who are Israelites indeed, are precisely in the state of the Jews in the wilderness, or of infants in their parents' arms. Their incapacity to guide or support themselves is quite as great, and their need of succour from on high as urgent. But God has taken the charge of them, and administered to them whatsoever their necessities required. Look ye back, ye "remnant of the house of Israel," and say, whether God has not incessantly watched over you for good; whether he has not borne with your weaknesses, supplied your wants, directed your ways, upheld you in your goings, and kept you from ten thousand snares, into which you must have inevitably fallen, and by which you must long since have perished, if he had for one hour intermitted his tender care? You cannot but acknowledge, that to you, as well as to the Jewish nation, is that description applicable: "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness: he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him[d]."]

But God further intimates,

II. What he has engaged to do for them—

To the Jews he promised a continuance of his care—

[The individuals whom he brought forth out of Egypt he suffered to die in the wilderness, on account of their multiplied iniquities: but the nation, as a nation, he preserved; and those children, whom their unbelieving parents supposed to be doomed to inevitable destruction, he brought in safety to the Promised Land. And though, by their innumerable transgressions, the nation has brought down his displeasure upon them, insomuch that they are scattered over the face of the whole earth, yet are they preserved in a way that no other nation under heaven ever has been, in order that they may ultimately enjoy all the blessings prepared for them. They are at this day living witnesses for him, that "he changeth not," but is still the same gracious and compassionate God as ever[e].]

To the spiritual Israel also he engages that he will keep them, even to the end—

["His gifts and calling are without repentance[f]." "Where he

[d] Deut. xxxii 10—12.

[e] This is the import of "I am he." See Ps. cii. 27.

[f] Rom. xi. 29.

he has begun a good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it, unto the day of Christ[g]." If "he has laid in our hearts the foundation of his spiritual temple, he will complete it[h];" and "be the finisher of the faith of which he has been the author[i]." "His ways in this respect are not like the ways of men:" *they*, either from impotence or versatility, often relinquish their plans: *he* never does. In his own mind he considers the blessings which he bestows, not merely as a benefit conferred, but as a pledge of future blessings: "He will not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people[k]." Hence we are justified in founding on the experience of past benefits an assured expectation of future: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: Wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living[l]?" The very repetitions in our text strongly confirm this important truth: "Even to hoar hairs *will I carry* you: I have made, and *I will bear;* even *I will carry*, and *will deliver* you." And to the same effect the apostle Paul, assuring us that God will keep his engagements with us, uses in one short sentence no less than five negatives; "He will never, never leave thee; he will never, never, never forsake thee[m]."]

From this statement of his own ways, he teaches us to infer,

III. His unrivalled title to our regard—

"To whom will ye liken me?" says he to his people of old: Are any of the gods of the heathen able to effect for their worshippers what I have wrought for you? So will I say to those who have received spiritual blessings at his hands: "To whom will ye liken him?" Who in the whole universe has such a title,

1. To your confidence?

[Are there any of the sons of man that could have brought you out of darkness into light, as he has done; or turned you from the power of Satan unto God? Could any of them have preserved you from the snares which Satan has spread for your feet? Who amongst them is able to keep you in future? or have you any sufficiency in yourselves, so as to "direct your own paths[n]," and to maintain your own stedfastness? No, verily: and nothing but a "curse awaits the man who trusteth in man, or who maketh flesh his arm[o]." God alone is

[g] Phil. i. 6. [h] Zech. iv. 9. [i] Heb. xii. 2. [k] 1 Sam. xii. 22.
[l] Ps. lvi. 13. [m] Heb. xiii. 5, 6. [n] Jer. x. 23. [o] Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

is equal to this task[p]: in him alone therefore must be all our hope, and all our trust———]

2. To your love—

[Amongst your fellow-creatures you may have many who, both for their personal qualities and their kindness to you, are entitled to your esteem. But to whom are you indebted, as you are to your Redeeming God? HE has come down from heaven for you: HE has died for you upon the cross: HE has wrought out a salvation for you: HE has by his Holy Spirit imparted that salvation to your souls: HE has given you that measure of stability which you have already evinced; and has engaged his almighty power to keep you even to the end. Where have you ever found such a Benefactor as he? where, one who can vie with him in any one particular? Truly in comparison of him the whole creation is but as the dust upon the balance: and therefore you should love him infinitely above all, and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee[q]"———]

Let me then, in conclusion, ADDRESS myself,

1. To those who entertain a rival in their hearts—

[You can easily see how just God's indignation was against those who worshipped graven images, in preference to him: but know, that he is no less offended with those who "provoke him to jealousy" by "setting up idols in their hearts." He says, and well may say, "My son, give ME thine heart[r]." This is his exclusive right: and if you withhold it from him, it matters not what else you give: it is all hateful in his eyes, and never will come before him with acceptance: "your very prayers will be an abomination in his sight[s]," and your best sacrifices only as "the cutting off a dog's neck, or offering swine's blood[t]"———]

2. To those who profess themselves to have experienced God's tender care—

[What *gratitude* becomes those who are so indebted to their God! Was Israel highly favoured above the heathen? Their obligations were nothing in comparison of yours. Their blessings, though great, were temporal: yours are spiritual and eternal——— But look around you and see, how many even of your own friends and relatives are yet in bondage to their sins; whilst you have been delivered with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Look also to those who have been "brought out of the world for a season, and yet been again entangled with it and overcome[u];" whilst you are yet "holding on your way." And who is it that has made the difference between you? Must you not say, "By the grace

[p] 2 Cor. i. 21. and iii. 5. [q] Ps. lxxiii. 25. [r] Prov. xxiii. 26.
[s] Prov. xv. 8. [t] Isai. lxvi. 3. [u] 2 Pet. ii. 20.

grace of God I am what I am?" Stir up then your souls to thankfulness, and say, "By Thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art He that took me out of my mother's bowels: *my praise shall be continually of thee*[x]."

And let your *confidence* in him for the future be entire. Lie in his hands precisely as a little infant in its parent's arms; and look to him, exactly as the Israelites in the wilderness did, to direct your every way, and to supply your every want. It is not possible for your reliance on God to be too simple or too entire. In this respect also is David an excellent pattern for you to follow: "Thou art He that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope, when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me! for trouble is near: for there is none to help. Be not thou far from me, O Lord! *O my strength, haste thee to help me*[y]!"

Let your *devotion* to him also be unreserved. "You are not your own, but his; and therefore you should glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his[z]." *This is what God expects at your hands:* "Ye have seen," says he, "how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will *obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant*, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me, above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. *These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel*[a]." Yes, these words I do speak to you in God's name. Your privileges are all a delusion, if they be not productive of this effect: but if they lead to this issue, then is God glorified in you, and ye shall ere long be glorified with him in the realms of bliss[b].]

[x] Ps. vii. 6. [y] Ps. xxii. 9, 10, 11, 19.
[z] 2 Cor. vi. 20. [a] Exod. xix. 4—6. [b] 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

DXVIII.

GOD'S TENDER CONCERN FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xlviii. 17, 18. *Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.*

THE reducing of Religion to a system is not without some use; because, by an orderly arrangement of

of all its parts, we are enabled to attain both a comprehensive and distinct view of the whole. But, when we presume to wrest any passages, or to weaken their true meaning, merely because they do not seem to accord with our system, we usurp a power that belongs not to us, and deprive ourselves of many benefits, which, if duly humbled, we might enjoy. It cannot be denied that God is the sovereign disposer of all events, and that "the Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will." But shall we therefore imagine that nothing depends on ourselves; that nothing is gained by obedience, or lost by disobedience? "We have not so learned Christ;" nor have we such partial views of his word. We believe, that however free and undeserved the gifts of God are, they would come down to us in richer abundance, if we were more earnest in seeking them; and that the true reason of our possessing so little is, that we labour so little to obtain fresh communications, or to improve those we have already received. If we would not enervate, or rather destroy, the force of our text, we must subscribe to this sentiment: for there God expresses his regret, that the obstinacy of his people prevented the descent of his blessings to them; which is a proof, that though his mercies are in some instances sovereignly and freely dispensed, yet they are not arbitrarily withheld from any; or, in other words, though some are elected to salvation, none are lost through an unmerited sentence of absolute and eternal reprobation.

To enter fully into the spirit of our text, it will be proper to consider,

I. Who it is that here addresses us—

When any thing is spoken to us by man, we involuntarily consider who it is that addresses us, and pay attention to the words in proportion to the wisdom, the goodness, or authority of the speaker. If he be a stranger, we feel a comparative indifference towards him; but if he be a friend, a benefactor, a father,

father, we are more observant of every thing he says. Now God frequently expatiates on his own character, in order that he may arrest our attention, and make a deeper impression on our minds. In the words before us, he describes himself by,

1. The relation he bears to us—

[God was related to Israel in a peculiar manner. He had brought them out of Egypt; and they were the only people that acknowledged him: He was therefore properly "their Redeemer; the Holy One of Israel, their God." The Christian Church, as a body, stand in a similar relation to him; and are in that respect distinguished, like the Jews, from all the idolatrous nations of the earth. But there are some, to whom, in a higher and more appropriate sense, he bears these relations. There are some whom he has really redeemed from sin and death; in whose hearts he reigns; and on whose behalf he exercises all his adorable perfections. Amongst this happy number we profess to be.

With what care and diligence then should *we* attend to the words before us, when we consider them as addressed to us by Him, who bought us with his own blood, and who has given himself to us as our God and portion for ever! — ——]

2. The kindness he exercises—

[As God gave unto Israel both the moral and ceremonial law for their instruction, and guided them through the wilderness for forty years, so is he now the instructor and leader of the Christian Church, who exclusively enjoy the light of revelation. But there are a favoured few, "a little flock," to whom these blessings are vouchsafed in a more especial manner. While multitudes never receive any benefit from the ministration of the Gospel, some are "taught to profit" by it: they are instructed in the knowledge of their own hearts; and are enabled to discern the suitableness of Christ to their necessities, and to live by faith upon him as their only Saviour[a]. They are also "led in the way that they should go:" they are brought from "the course of this world in which they were walking," and are guided into the way of peace and holiness[b].

If *we* have experienced these blessings, surely we cannot but "give earnest heed to the things" spoken in the text, since they are spoken by Him, to whose gracious teaching we owe all the knowledge we possess, and to whose protecting care we are indebted for every step that we have taken in the way to Canaan——]

Let

[a] Acts xvi. 14. 1 John v. 20.
[b] Acts xxvi. 18. Eph. ii. 1—5. Tit. iii. 3—5.

Let us listen then with the deepest reverence to the voice of our Benefactor: let us hear,

II. The regret he expresses on our account—

In his words we may notice,

1. The matter of his regret—

[God is not an unconcerned spectator of our conduct. He is not satisfied with giving us his commands, and leaving us to obey them or not, as we please: he longs to engage our most affectionate regards to him and his service: and, when all his efforts are in vain, he takes up a lamentation over us, as a father over a disobedient and incorrigible child[bb]. And what abundant occasion has he for regret on our account! He has commanded us to come to him, to live in a state of holy fellowship with him, and to delight ourselves in him. But how deaf are we to his intreaties, and how slow of heart to obey his voice! It is not the ungodly alone over whom he has cause to lament, but even his own people: yes, even they, whose God he is, and whom he has redeemed with his own precious blood; they whom he has instructed by his word and Spirit, and whom he has led by his Providential care; even they, I say, grieve him by their inattention, and provoke him to displeasure by their neglect: and so is he at times weighed down, as it were, by their misconduct, that he scarcely knows how to bear with them, or how to act towards them[c].]

2. The reason of it—

[And what is it that occasions his regret? Would he gain any thing by our obedience? or does he lose any thing by our disobedience[d]? No: he knows how much we lose by our folly; and it grieves him, that, when he is so desirous of loading us with his richest benefits, we should be so regardless of our own interest and happiness.

If we were uniformly zealous and active in the service of our God, "our peace would flow down" in a serene, uninterrupted course, "like a river;" and "our righteousness," or prosperity of soul, would "like the waves of the sea," be exalted, irresistible, and boundless. We should find "the work of righteousness to be peace[e];" we should have great[f], and abundant[g] peace; and "*in* keeping God's commandments we should have a rich reward[h]." Is there not then cause for regret, that we should be such enemies to our own welfare; and that, instead of enjoying the felicity of God's chosen, we should

[bb] Matt. xxiii. 37. & Luke xix. 42.
[c] Am. ii. 13. Jer. iii. 19. Hos. xi. 8.
[d] Job xxii. 2, 3.
[e] Isai. xxxii. 17.
[f] Ps. cxix. 165.
[g] Ps. lxxii. 7.
[h] Ps. xix. 11.

should scarcely differ, either in comfort or holiness, from the ungodly world around us? Yes; if angels rejoice over our prosperity, they may well join with their Maker in pathetic lamentations over the greater part of the Christian Church.]

INFER,

1. How bitter will be the reflections of the ungodly in a future world!

[*Now* God laments over them; but they regard him not; *then* they will lament over their own state; and he will not regard them. *Then* they will adopt the very language of the text: "O that I had hearkened to God's commandments! then would my peace at this moment have been constant as a river, and boundless as the sea." I should not have been in this place of torment: I should not have been weeping and wailing and gnashing my teeth in hopeless agony, as I now do: no; I should have been like those in Abraham's bosom; I should have been holy as God is holy, and happy to the utmost extent of my capacities or desires. O fool that I was! O that I had hearkened to God's commandments! I was warned, but would not believe: I was exhorted, but would not comply: O that it were possible to obtain one more offer of mercy! But, alas! that is a fruitless wish———

Beloved Brethren, Why will ye not consider these things before it be too late?]

2. How blessed may the ungodly yet become, if they will only seek after God!

[The words of the text were spoken in reference to the very people who were afterwards carried captive to Babylon; and therefore they may be considered as addressed to every individual amongst us. God is not willing that any of us should perish[j]: he desires rather that we should come to repentance and live[k]. He is as willing to be their Redeemer, and their God, as to be the God of any person in the universe. He would teach and guide them as cheerfully, and as effectually as he taught the Prophets and Apostles of old. "O that they were wise, and would consider these things! they should surely then understand the loving-kindness of the Lord[l]:" they should be filled with "a peace that passeth all understanding," and have, both in their purity and joy, a sweet foretaste of their heavenly inheritance.]

[j] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. [k] 2 Pet. iii. 9. [l] Ps. cvii. 43.

DXIX.

GOD WILL NOT FORGET HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. xlix. 14—16. *But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget: yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.*

WERE the glorious truths of Christianity allowed their due operation on the hearts of men, this world would be a scene of universal peace and happiness: "the heavens and the earth, the mountains," and the valleys, would form one harmonious concert, all singing aloud for joy at the glad tidings of redemption through the sufferings of our incarnate God. But the great mass of mankind disregard the tidings as "a cunningly devised fable;" whilst multitudes who profess to believe them, derive no comfort from them, by reason of the corrupt state of their own minds, and the hard thoughts which they entertain of God. In the verse preceding our text, we see what reason there is for joy; but in the text itself we are told, how lamentably the proper influence of the Gospel is counteracted by the mistakes and errors of God's professing people, which yet he is endeavouring by all possible means to rectify.

We here behold,

I. The Church's complaint againt God—

The complaint, in its primary sense, may be understood as uttered by the Church in Babylon, where her state was indeed most disconsolate. Moreover, in the present dispersion of her members, which has now continued so many hundred years, we may find a further ground for the complaint, that she is forsaken and forgotten of her God. St. Paul, aware that there was in appearance some reason for such an apprehension, states the question, "Has God cast off his people?" and then, by an appeal to fact, he establishes the truth which is asserted in our text, in opposition to it[a].

But

[a] Rom. xi. 1—5.

But it is in reference to individuals, and not to the Church at large, that we shall consider the complaint. It is common for persons under the Christian dispensation to adopt the language of our text. We will therefore state,

1. The *occasions* that most generally give birth to it—

[Among the various causes of such a desponding apprehension, the first to be noticed is, *A long continuance of some temporal affliction.* Little as we think of God in a state of prosperity, and little as we are inclined to mark his hand in the earlier stages of adversity, when we have long been oppressed with trials, our mind almost of necessity reverts to him as the author of them; and *that* too, not in a way of meek submission, but in a way of murmuring and discontent. Thus did the Church in David's days: she complained that God had cast her off[b]; and adduced all her trials as proofs of her assertion[c]: and then, as though God were asleep, and had altogether forgotten her affliction, she intreats him to "awake, and arise" for her relief[d]. Thus also did Job, though on the whole a perfect man, sink at last under his troubles, and become the accuser of his God[e]. And perhaps, if we inquired diligently into the first causes of despondency, we should generally find that it has originated in temporal afflictions, which have put the soul off its balance, and disposed it to entertain hard thoughts of God.

Another occasion of such apprehensions is, *a long continuance of guilt upon the conscience.* After we are sensible that we have sinned, we are frequently a long time before we can humble ourselves before God as we ought to do: and whilst that hardness of heart continues, it is impossible but that we must be harassed with much disquietude. Thus it was with David, after his sin in the matter of Uriah: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long: (for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me:) my moisture is turned into the drought of summer[f]." That "iniquities will separate between us and our God, and cause him to hide his face from us," is certain[g]: but we are not therefore to conclude, that he has forsaken and forgotten us; since, however he may "speak against us," as with the voice of an enemy, "he does earnestly remember us still; yea, his bowels are troubled for us," till, by our humiliation and contrition, we open a way for him to exercise, consistently with his own

[b] Ps. xliv. 9. [c] ib. ver. 10—14, 22. [d] ib. ver. 23—26.
[e] Job iii. 23, 24. & vi. 2—4. [f] Ps. xxxii. 3, 4.
[g] Isai. lix. 2.

own honour, his tender mercy towards us[h]. Nevertheless, till that reconciliation takes place, the distress of a soul that dreads his displeasure must be great indeed[i].

One more occasion of such apprehensions is, *A want of answers to prayer.* When God is following us with invitations to accept of mercy, we think nothing of months or years: but, if he delay an answer to our supplications, a few days or weeks appear an age; and we begin to conclude that he will never vouchsafe us any answer at all. Perhaps, of all reasons for despondency, this is the most justifiable; because God has so often promised to hear and answer the prayers of his people: and from hence we may account for those sad complaints, which David, the man after God's own heart, uttered against his God[k]. Doubtless it is distressing to be constrained to say, "I cry in the day time, and thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent:" but the proper reflection for the soul in such cases is, "Thou nevertheless continuest holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel[l]."]

2. The *dispositions and principles* from which it springs—

[Whatever be the *occasion* of desponding apprehensions, they always arise *from a morbid state of mind:* for, if we were in a right frame, we should, under all circumstances, say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him[m]."

At the root of all despondency will be found *impatience.* We do not like to wait God's time: we would "walk by sight, rather than by faith;" and, if we have not immediately what we desire, we are ready to ask, "Is the Lord amongst us, or not[n]?" We have a surprising exhibition of this spirit among the more religious part of the Jews in the time of the prophet Jeremiah: God had denounced his judgments against the whole nation; and had refused to hear any prayers that should be offered for them[o]. Upon this they complain, "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath thy soul lothed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble. We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; do not *disgrace the throne of thy glory:* remember, *break not thy covenant with us*[p]." Now, after every allowance which must be made for the condescension of God in permitting his people to plead with him, we cannot but think, that the terms here

[h] Jer. xxxi. 20.
[i] Ps. xxxi. 9, 10.
[k] Ps. lxxxviii. 1—7, 9, 13—16.
[l] Ps. xxii. 3, 4.
[m] Job xiii. 15.
[n] Exod. xvii. 7.
[o] Jer. xiv. 10, 11.
[p] ib. ver. 19—21.

here used, savour of impatience; and that a more respectful and reverential language would have better comported with their state. But strong feelings usually issue in hasty and unadvised expressions.

Another source from which these apprehensions spring, is *Unbelief*. The promises of God are as clear as the powers of language can express: but we know not how to believe them. Sometimes they appear too good to be true: at other times we doubt whether they are made to *us:* and at other times we are ready to think that they *cannot* be fulfilled; yea, the very providence of God seems to oppose their accomplishment. Hence we listen to the dictates of sense, and, because of our present distress, conclude that God hath forsaken and forgotten us. This was the unhappy experience of David himself, who was brought by his trouble to ask, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? *doth his promise fail for evermore?* Hath God *forgotten to be gracious?* hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies[q]?" Well might he add, "This was my infirmity[r];" for a dreadful infirmity it was, to entertain such distressing apprehensions for himself, and such injurious thoughts of God. Yet thus it is, that, under the influence of unbelief, multitudes are yet daily dishonouring their God.

But we must not omit to mention, that these apprehensions frequently proceed also from *disease of body or mind*. There is a nervous habit of body that is very apt to produce the feelings we are now speaking of; and, the mind partaking of the weakness of the body, Satan takes advantage of it, to impress on the imagination every thing that is gloomy and melancholy: "God has not elected me: I am given over to a reprobate mind: I have sinned away my day of grace: I have committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost: It is in vain for me to pray; for my doom is sealed: God has entirely forsaken me, and, as to any purposes of his grace, has eternally *forgotten* me." This is indeed a most distressing state of mind; and the more so, because the persons so affected have not the least conception from whence all their distresses arise. Their apprehensions about God have the same effect on them as if they were founded in truth: and it often happens, that a man's whole life is embittered by fears, which the restoration of bodily health would remove at once. It seems probable that David, whose experience under all the diversified circumstances of his life is so fully recorded in the Psalms, had somewhat of this trial also; for, under the united pressure of bodily and mental disease, he doubted whether he should ever be restored to a sense of the Divine favour[s]. But, at

[q] Ps. lxxvii. 1—9. [r] ib. ver. 10. [s] Ps. vi. 1—7.

at all events, it is desirable that they who have to deal with troubled consciences, should be aware that this apparently religious depression is often little more than a bodily disorder; and that they should in many such cases recommend a physician for the body, as the most likely means of curing, what, to an ignorant observer, would appear a disease of the soul.]

From hearing Zion's complaint against God, let us turn our attention to,

II. The consolatory reply of God to her—

God desiring that his people should be filled with "strong consolation," has given them such assurance of his care and love, as shall be abundantly sufficient to dissipate all their fears, if only they rely on his word. That no part of his address to them may escape our notice, let us consider,

1. The assurance that he gives them—

[Let the Church's complaint be borne in mind; because to that his answer is immediately directed. She had said, "The Lord hath forsaken me; my Lord hath forgotten me." To this he answers, "I will not forget thee;" or, as it is most tenderly expressed in another part, "O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me[t]." Assertions to the same effect occur in numberless other passages of Scripture, and under a variety of forms[u]: but no where is it made with greater force than in the passage before us. He appeals to us respecting the care of earthly parents over their offspring. A father is represented as full of pity towards his suffering child[x], and as sparing with affectionate regard his duteous son[y]. It is even taken for granted, that a parent *cannot* disregard, and much less mock, the necessities of his child, "giving him a stone when he asks for bread, or a scorpion, when he desires an egg[z]." And, if a father cannot act thus, how much less can a mother turn her back upon her sucking infant, and forget to administer to its necessities, when even her bodily feelings, no less than the tender emotions of her mind, must interest her deeply in supplying its wants. Rare as are instances of a mother being entirely destitute of natural affection, some have been found who, through shame, have murdered their own offspring; and, through the pressure of famine, have even devoured them. It was foretold that such instances would occur[a]; and we know that they did occur at different times:

[t] Isai. xliv. 21.
[u] 1 Sam. xii. 22. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. Mal. ii. 16. Rom. xi. 29.
[x] Ps. ciii. 13. [y] Mal. iii. 17. [z] Matt. vii. 9—11.
[a] Lev. xxvi. 29.

times[b]: but, says God, though there may be found, not only one but many such unnatural mothers, no such forgetfulness of my children shall ever be found in me; I will never forget my Church at large, nor any individual of it in particular. As for my Church at large, "I will keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it day and night[c]:" and, as for the weakest individuals that are found in it, I will consider them as infants with whom I have travailed in birth; and will carry them in my bosom, till time and age have worn away their strength, and covered their heads with hoary locks[d]. Both collectively and individually, "Mine eye shall be upon them from one end of the year unto the other end of the year[e];" and not only shall "their place of defence be the munitions of rocks, but bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure[f]."]

2. His confirmation of it—

[To confirm his assertion the more strongly, he introduces two striking and well-known illustrations. The first is taken from a custom which prevailed among the Jews, of imprinting on their flesh, by punctures or by staining, an image of the Temple, in order at all times to bring it to their remembrance. Now, says God, I have you, and all my children, imprinted thus upon my heart, and on my arms[g]. I have set you there as a seal or signet, which shall operate at all times to remind me of you, and to interest me in your favour: yea, "I have graven you on the palms of my hands;" so that *I can never open my hand to dispense blessings to any of my creatures, but I must instantly behold your name,* and be stirred up to supply your every want. What a beautiful and encouraging representation is this! Nor is the other illustration at all less comforting to the mind. It refers to an Architect, who, whilst he is only just beginning to lay the foundation, has a perfect idea of the whole building in his mind, and sees it there as plainly as if it were already complete. Thus does God even now behold the entire building of his Church complete in all its parts, not a stone wanting or out of the place ordained for it; yea, he sees also every individual stone formed and fashioned according to his sovereign will, and fitted perfectly for the situation which in his eternal counsels he has appointed it to fill. To a common eye all may appear at present a scene of confusion: but to him who seeth all from the beginning, all is in perfect order as far as it has advanced; and the whole edifice is, as it were, already prepared as a meet habitation for the God of heaven[h].

Say

[b] 2 Kin. vi. 28, 29. Lam. iv. 10.
[c] Isai. xxvii. 3.
[d] Isai. xlvi. 3, 4.
[e] Deut. xi. 12.
[f] Isai. xxxiii. 16.
[g] Cant. viii. 6.
[h] Eph. ii. 20—22.

Say then, Whether there be any ground for the complaint which we have been considering? Can God have forsaken his people, when he is ever present with them? Can he have forgotten them, when he is incessantly carrying on his work in their hearts? He may, it is true, for wise and gracious purposes, so veil himself, that they shall not immediately behold him; but he can no more forget his redeemed people, than he can forget the interests of his beloved Son, or the honour of his own perfections. This he has stated in the fullest manner, for the comfort of his people[i]——— and, whether we believe it or not, he will accomplish every jot and tittle of it in its season. As he has no inducement to falsify his word, so he *will* not, "he *cannot*, deny himself[k]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have forsaken and forgotten God—

[Hear ye the complaint which God utters; "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me, days without number[l]." Alas! how true is this of multitudes amongst ourselves! Though "He is the fountain of living waters, yet have we forsaken him, and hewn out to ourselves cisterns that can hold no water[m]." We have even laboured to blot out the remembrance of him from our minds: and so thoroughly have we succeeded in this impious attempt, that, as the Searcher of hearts himself testifies, "God is not in all our thoughts[n]." Every vanity has been harboured in our minds; but we have found there no room for God: in short, we have lived "without God in the world[o]." What astonishing wickedness is this, that, when God has been following us with invitations and intreaties all our days, saying to us, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" we have "refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped our ears that we should not hear[p]." This however cannot always continue: God "will not always strive with us" in this manner: the time is coming when he will requite us according to our deeds, and turn a deaf ear to all our intreaties[q]? O that we may be wise in time, and improve aright "this day of our salvation[r]!"]

2. Those who think they are forsaken and forgotten of God—

[This may be the state even of the best of men; for David, and even the Messiah himself, in a season of dereliction, cried, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me[s]?" Nevertheless, for the most part, the hidings of God's face

[i] Isai. liv. 7—10, 17. [k] 2 Tim. ii. 13. [l] Jer. ii. 32. [m] ib. ver. 13.
[n] Ps. x. 4. [o] Eph. ii. 12. [p] Zech. vii. 11.
[q] Prov. i. 24—31. [r] Compare ver 8. with 2 Cor. vi. 2.
[s] Ps. xxii. 1.

face may be traced to some special cause; some inward lust unmortified, or some wilful neglect indulged. Search out then, and put away, whatever is displeasing to your God. But, if you cannot find any particular reason for the dispensation, then follow that advice of the prophet, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and yet walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God[t]." Let him plead with God, as David did, and sum up his petitions with that bold request, "Arise, O God, and plead thine own cause[u]!" We may be sure that "God will not contend with us for ever, because he knows that our spirits would fail before him, and the souls which he hath made[x]." Even where we have been wilfully rebellious, he gives us reason to hope, that, for his own sake, he will heal our wounds, and speak comfortably to our souls[y]: but, if we humble ourselves before him, then are we sure that in due season he will lift us up[z].

Let every one then, however disconsolate he may be at the present moment, yea though heaven, earth, and hell should seem conspiring to destroy him[a], check his unbelieving fears, and say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God[b]."]

[t] Isai. l. 10. [u] Ps. lxxiv. 19—22. [x] Isai. lvii. 16.
[y] ib. ver. 17, 18. & Hos. ii. 14. [z] Jam. iv. 10.
[a] Ps. xlii. 7. [b] ib. ver. 11.

DXX.

PROMISED INCREASE OF THE CHURCH.

Isai. xlix. 18—23. *Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all as with an ornament, and bind them on thee as a bride doeth. For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants; and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place for me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the*

Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters upon their shoulders: and kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

TO consider past events, and especially those recorded in the holy Scriptures, is obviously the duty of every man; since from them we learn the true character of God, and know what we are to expect at his hands. Nor are present things to occupy a small portion of our regard: for, though we cannot judge of them with certainty, or declare what their ultimate issue will be, we behold them stamped with a visible impression of Divine wisdom and goodness: the very chastisements of heaven, if viewed aright, convey to us the idea of parental love. But we have a further duty, which is, to look into futurity, and to read in the page of prophecy the events that are yet future. We are not indeed to expect that we ourselves shall be enabled to prophesy, or to obtain such an insight into futurity as to discover the times and the seasons which God has reserved in his own hands: but there are certain great events which shall assuredly come to pass, and which it is our privilege to look forward to, as the pious Jews waited for the coming of their Lord, and looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Indeed it is for this end that the prophecies are given us; namely, that having expected the completion of them, we should acknowledge God in the events whereby they are completed.

In the passage before us, there is a prophecy relating to the future state of the Church: in discoursing upon which we shall notice,

I. The promised increase of the Church—

In the verse preceding our text, the substance of the promise is contained[a]: and in our text itself, its accomplishment is represented as actually begun.

In

[a] In Bp. Lowth's Translation it stands thus: "They that destroyed thee shall become thy builders; and they that have laid thee waste, shall become thine offspring."

In two respects is the Church to be increased;

1. In number—

[To enter fully into the spirit of this prophecy, we should call to mind the state of Israel in Palestine. The land of Canaan was but a small tract of country, when compared with the numbers that were to inhabit it; so that some of the tribes, particularly Dan, and Ephraim, and Manasseh, complained of the smallness of their lot[b]. But, after the desolations occasioned by the Assyrians and Chaldeans, the population was so reduced, that they were quite insufficient to inhabit the cities, or to cultivate the ground[c]. Imagine now the people all on a sudden restored to their country, and multiplied far beyond all former precedent; what surprise would be excited, and what universal clamour for want of room! Such is the change which is here predicted in relation to the Church: the numbers that shall be added to it will surpass all human expectation, so that "space shall not even be found for them[d]." In every country, in every city, in every village, yea in every congregation also, shall converts spring up as the piles of grass in the earth[e], and "shall say in the ears of the Church, The place is too strait for me: give place for me that I may dwell." The Church herself shall be filled with utter amazement at the multitudes that flock to her; and shall say in her heart, "Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone: these, where had they been?"

Incredible as this may appear, the prophet not only foretells it, but speaks of it as at that moment taking place before his eyes; and of God himself, as swearing that the whole multitude shall become brighter ornaments to the Church, than the richest jewels to a bride[f].]

2. In honour—

[It is not the poor only that shall devote themselves to God in that day, but the rich also. Hitherto "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble have been called[g]:" but then it shall not be so: for all the great and mighty of the earth "shall bring their sons in their arms, and their daughters (in litters) upon their shoulders; and kings shall be the nursing-fathers of the Church, and queens her nursing-mothers." As for the enemies of the Church, they shall all be prostrate before her, and "lick up the very dust of her feet:" and God shall be as manifestly revealed among them as ever he was in the days of old[h].

Is

[b] Josh. xvii. 14—18. & xix. 47. [c] 2 Kin. xxiv. 14.
[d] Zech. x. 10. [e] Ps. lxxii. 16. [f] ver. 18.
[g] 1 Cor. i. 26. [h] ver. 23.

Is it asked, How shall this great change be effected? We answer, "*God* will lift up *his* hand to the Gentiles, and set up *his* standard to the people:" he will cause the standard of the cross to be erected in every place, and by the influence of his Spirit will reveal his Son in the hearts of men; "making them willing in the day of his power," and rendering "his Gospel the power of God to the salvation of their souls."

Perhaps in this passage there is a more immediate and explicit declaration of the way in which God's ancient people the Jews shall be converted to the faith. We have reason from St. Paul to think, that an extraordinary conversion of the Gentiles shall precede the restoration of the Jews[i]: and here, it should seem, that God will make the efforts of those Gentiles instrumental to the conversion of his once-favoured people: "I will lift up mine hand to *the Gentiles*, and THEY shall bring *thy* sons in their arms, and *thy* daughters on their shoulders." Surely this thought should animate us to diffuse as far as possible the knowledge of salvation through the heathen world, that, the Gentiles being made partakers of this grace, the Jews may be provoked to jealousy to seek it for themselves[k].]

Let us now contemplate,

II. The encouragement it affords us for Missionary exertions—

Is such a glorious prospect held forth to us, and shall we be indifferent about it, or entertain a doubt of its being realized in due season? No: we will expect it rather, and by anticipation rejoice in it: for,

1. God is able to effect this great thing—

[Were this promised event to be produced by human efforts only, we might well doubt whether it should ever be accomplished. But God has taken the matter into his own hand; and has said "*I* will *do* it; *I* will lift up my hand to the Gentiles." And, if GOD will work, who shall let it? It is worthy of remark, that St. Paul himself grounds his assured expectation of these events on this very consideration of God's almighty power. Speaking of the Jews being again grafted into their own olive-tree, he says, "They, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is *able* to graff them in again[l]." In the very chapter before us also, God mentions his all-powerful interposition as an effectual antidote to all the unbelieving fears of his people. The Church, doubting almost the possibility of the promised events, asks, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the

[i] Rom. xi. 25, 26. [k] ib. ver. 11—14. [l] ib. ver. 23.

the lawful captive delivered?" Can it be hoped, that they who are in bondage to such powerful adversaries, and have even sold themselves, as it were, by their iniquities, should ever be redeemed? Yes; "thus saith the Lord; Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away; and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for *I* will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and *I* will save thy children[m]." Let us expect it then at the hands of God, knowing that "what he has promised, he is able also to perform." Let difficulties, how great soever they may appear in themselves, be as nothing in our eyes, because that omnipotence is engaged to surmount them all; and "nothing can be too hard for the Lord."]

2. God has moreover actually engaged to effect it—

[Survey the promise in our text, confirmed by a most solemn oath, and therefore "confirmed by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have the stronger consolation." Compare with it many other passages of Holy Writ, which speak decidedly to the same effect[n]—— Shall all these fail of their accomplishment? Surely "God is not a man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent." As to "the times and the seasons, he has reserved them in his own power: but the ultimate accomplishment of them, if we may so speak, he has put out of his own power; because "He cannot deny himself;" and he has himself assured us, in reference to this very thing, that "his gifts and calling are without repentance[o]."]

3. The beginnings of it are already visible before our eyes—

[What the prophet says by anticipation, we may almost speak literally: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee." Since the Apostolic age, there has been no period like the present[p]; all nations making peace in the spirit of peace; and societies of every kind combining, not in this land only, but in foreign lands also, to translate the Scriptures into all languages, and to impart them to every nation under heaven: Is not this the finger of God? and is not God's display of his own almighty operation a motive and a call to us to work together with him? Doubtless, if ever there was a time that we were particularly encouraged to engage in Missionary exertions, it is now: "The sound is already gone forth in the tops of the mulberry-trees;" and therefore this is the

[m] ver. 24, 25. [n] Isai. liv. 1—3. lxi. 4—6. and lxvi. 18—20.
[o] Rom. xi. 29. [p] June 5, 1814, three days after the tidings of peace had arrived.

the time for us to "bestir ourselves: God is already gone out before us[q];" and he will be with us in all that we put our hands unto.]

We CONCLUDE with pointing out our duty in reference to this great event:

1. Let our expectations of it be enlarged—

[St. Paul represents the whole creation as waiting and longing for this blessed period[r]: and shall not *we*, "we, who already have the first-fruits of the Spirit[s];" shall not we be expecting this glorious harvest? Shall we not look forward with holy joy to that time when "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ[t]?" O glorious day! The Lord hasten it in his time!———]

2. Let our prayers for it be poured forth—

[We cannot contemplate the universal reign of peace, and love, and holiness, without feeling an ardent desire that it might immediately commence, or without crying unto God, "How long, O Lord, wilt thou not have mercy on the world, against which thou hast had indignation almost six thousand years[u]?" Indeed God has particularly commanded that we should pray to him on this subject, and not give him rest, till he arise and answer our petitions[x]——— We are not to imagine, that because the period is fixed in the Divine counsels, it is therefore in vain for us to pray: for God has invariably connected the accomplishment of his promises with the prayers of his people; and however absolute his promises may be, "he will yet be inquired of, to do the things which he has promised[y]."]

3. Let our exertions be used—

[God works by means: and it is by a blessing upon our efforts that he will accomplish his own gracious purposes. In this view, the answer which he gives to the petitions of his Church on this subject is very remarkable. The Church, in terms the most appropriate that can be imagined, intreats him to arise and execute this great work: "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the antient days, in the generations of old! &c. &c.[z]" And what is his reply? Does he content himself with renewing his promises to fulfil their desire in due season? No: he says, "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem[a]!" and again, "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion! shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down,

[q] 2 Sam. 5. 24.
[r] Rom. viii. 19—22.
[s] ib. ver. 23.
[t] Rev. xi. 15.
[u] Zech. i. 12. & Rev. vi. 10.
[x] Isai. lxii. 1—7.
[y] Ezek. xxxvi. 36, 37.
[z] Isai. li. 9, 10.
[a] ib. ver. 17.

down, O Jerusalem! loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion[b]!" And so far is our entire dependence upon him from being a reason for listless inactivity, that it is the strongest reason for putting forth our utmost exertions: we must "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure[c]." Let all of us then awake for the occasion, and inquire, What we can do for the advancement of the Gospel, either at home or abroad? How can we aid the different Societies that are established for these ends? Let us consider our time and our talents, our wealth and our influence, yea, our bodies and our souls, as consecrated to the Lord, and as to be disposed of by him in such a way as shall be most subservient to his glory. Then, if we live not to see the Temple of our God erected, we shall at least have the comfort of having provided materials for it: and at all events we shall secure to ourselves a rich reward; for God himself in our text assures us, that "they shall not be ashamed that wait for him."]

[b] Isai. lii. 1, 2. [c] Phil. ii. 12, 13.

DXXI.

DESPONDING FEARS REMOVED.

Isai. xlix. 24—26. *Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the Lord; Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee; and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh, and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know, that I the Lord am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.*

THE human mind is prone to extremes. Before we come into trials, we think them easy to be borne: but, when oppressed with them, we are apt to sink under them as an insupportable burthen: The Jews, previous to their captivity in Babylon, would never believe that such an event could take place: but, when they felt the galling yoke, they could not at all conceive that their Church should ever behold such glorious days as they were encouraged to expect. Certainly, humanly speaking, there was reason enough for them to despair: for they were in a state of

of the most abject slavery; the people by whom they were enslaved were the most powerful of any upon earth; and they had a consciousness, that they had sold themselves into that very state, by their iniquities. Hence they ask, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" To this, however, God gives them a most gracious answer, assuring them, that he will interpose effectually in their behalf, and deliver them for his own name sake.

But we must not confine the words to the Jewish Church. They may properly be applied to God's people in all ages; and be considered as representing,

I. Their desponding fears—

Whilst men are living as without God in the world, they are for the most part unconscious of any danger; or at least they think that they are in no danger from which they may not easily be delivered. But as soon as they are awakened to a sense of their lost condition, they are apt to yield to the most discouraging apprehensions, on account of,

1. Their weakness—

[They see that they have been in a state of captivity all their days, having been *taken alive*, as it were, by the devil, and been led "captive by him at his will[a]." And how shall they ever recover themselves from his snares? He is a god, even "the god of this world," who "ruleth in all the children of disobedience[b]." Shall the prey be taken from one who is so mighty? As well might a lamb hope to deliver itself out of the jaws of a lion, as they to liberate themselves from that "roaring lion who is just ready to devour them[c]"———]

2. Their desert—

[It is not their misfortune merely, but their fault, that they are in this sad bondage: they have "sold themselves to it by their iniquities[d]": as Esau bartered away his rights of primogeniture for a mess of pottage[e], so have they their liberty. They have chosen the gratifications of the flesh from the very first moment that they began to act: the indulgence of their corrupt inclinations was more to them than the favour of their God; so that by continual and wilful habits they have confirmed their natural propensities, and riveted the chains which Adam

[a] 2 Tim. ii. 26. ἐζωγρημένοι. [b] 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2.
[c] 1 Pet. v. 8. [d] Isai. l. 1. [e] Heb. xii. 16.

Adam forged. Feeling themselves thus "sold under sin[f]," and become, as it were, the lawful property of Satan, they ask, "Shall the lawful captive be delivered?" The many acts of wilful transgression by which they have given him a right over them, appear an insurmountable bar to their deliverance, insomuch that the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision scarcely appear in a more hopeless state than they[g]. In this view of their just desert, they are tempted to say, "There is no hope[h]."]

These feelings however may well be assuaged by,

II. The gracious promises of God to them—

It is delightful to observe how directly God meets the wants and wishes of his people: the very language of their fears is here adopted by him, and made the vehicle of his promises to their souls. He engages that,

1. He himself will interpose for their deliverance—

[In a most wonderful way did he rescue his people from their captivity in Babylon. He raised up against that city an enemy; and, *in the precise way that he had foretold*, delivered it into his hands, even into the hands of Cyrus, whom he had specified by name above two hundred years before he existed in the world: and by him he dealt to the Babylonians that measure which they had before meted to his people[i], "feeding them with their own flesh, and making them drunk with their own blood." And thus "will he bruise Satan also under his people's feet[k]." Strong as Satan is, God has raised up against him One stronger than he, who has overcome him, and taken from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and utterly despoiled him[l]. The Lord Jesus "came on purpose to destroy the works of the devil[m];" and he did destroy them. "Upon the cross he triumphed over him openly[n]," and "by his own death utterly destroyed him," "and delivered from his power millions whom he had held in the most cruel bondage[o]." In his resurrection and ascension "he led captive," as it were at his chariot wheels, this malignant foe[p]; and has left his people nothing but to triumph over a vanquished enemy[q].

Here then is God's gracious answer to his people's fears. Are you asking, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? Yes, the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered:

[f] Rom. vii. 14. [g] Ezek. xxxvii. 11. [h] Jer. ii. 25.
[i] See Jer. xxxi. especially ver. 35, 36, 49, 56.
[k] Rom. xvi. 20. [l] Luke xi. 21, 22. [m] 1 John iii. 8.
[n] Col. ii. 15. [o] Heb. ii. 14, 15. [p] Eph. iv. 8.
[q] John xvi. 11.

delivered: for I will contend with them that contend with thee, and I will save thy children." What more than this can any soul desire? for, is not God able to deliver? or will he falsify his word? "Hath he said, and will he not do it? hath he spoken, and will he not make it good?"

But he further promises, that,]

2. He will glorify himself in their salvation—

[The deliverance of his people from Babylon, and their restoration to their own land, was an event that excited the astonishment of all the surrounding nations: "They saw, and could not but acknowledge, that he was their Saviour and Redeemer, even the Mighty One of Jacob." His own glory also will he display in the deliverance of his desponding people, as soon as ever they simply and believingly commit their cause to him. In fact, there is not in the whole universe a more striking monument of God's power than a redeemed soul. "He is a new creation[r]." And, if it be said, "He is still weak;" true, he is so: but he is "a worm threshing the mountains[s];" and "God's strength shall be perfected in his weakness[t]," and shall carry him on, though in the midst of the most potent enemies, "from strength to strength, till he shall finally appear before his God in Zion[u]." To whatever circumstances he may be reduced by the assaults of men or devils, the Lord Jesus Christ will make them only a more conspicuous occasion for the display of "his own grace, which shall surely be sufficient" for all who trust in it, and shall constrain even their enemies themselves to acknowledge that the power which supports them is Divine[x].]

Here then we SEE,

1. What extremes we are to avoid—

[In the concerns of our souls, we should stand at an equal distance from presumption and despondency. It surely can never be right for persons, corrupt as we are, to presume upon salvation, as though it were a blessing easy to be attained. We are in a state of bondage to sin and Satan———(To this our whole lives bear witness.) The power of our adversary is such as no human being has within himself an ability to withstand———(His victory over our first parents in Paradise is proof enough of this.) Nor, considering how willing servants we have been to the destroyer, have we any just cause to expect the interposition of Jehovah in our behalf. Are we then to be secure and careless, as if we were in no danger? If "the righteous *scarcely* be saved," shall we be as much at our ease as if no effort were necessary to counteract the designs

[r] 2 Cor. v. 17. Eph. ii. 10.
[s] Isai. xli. 14—16.
[t] 2 Cor. xii. 9.
[u] Ps. lxxxiv. 7.
[x] Dan. iii. 28. & vi. 25—27.

designs of Satan, and to rescue ourselves from his dominion? No verily: we must "not be high-minded, but fear."

On the other hand, shall we because of these difficulties and dangers, give way to a desponding frame? Shall we forget that there is a Saviour, who is both able and willing to deliver us? Justly does God reprove such folly and ingratitude: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding[y]." To entertain such thoughts, is greatly to dishonour God, whose tenderness and fidelity infinitely exceed all that ever existed in a mother's bosom towards her infant offspring[z]. Whatever therefore be our difficulties or our dangers, we should confide in Him who has undertaken for us that "we shall take those captive whose captives we were, and shall rule over our oppressors[a]."]

2. What is that happy medium which it becomes us to observe—

[The proper medium is, not to lessen either our fears or our hopes; but to call them forth into united and simultaneous exercise. Instead of attempting to lessen our sense of danger, it is desirable to have it augmented an hundred-fold: because then we shall feel the deeper need of God's help, and be the more earnest in our prayers to him for it. So again, instead of lowering our expectations from God, we should endeavour to have them also greatly enlarged; because we shall then honour him the more, and go forth with tenfold energy to fight the good fight of faith. This is that union, which, whilst it humbles the sinner, will exalt the Saviour, and lead us, like the heavenly hosts, to fall on our faces before him, at the very time that we are glorying in his salvation[b]. This is a point which is never fully understood, but by experience. Those who have never known it by experience, are ready to imagine, that a deep sense of guilt and helplessness will produce discouragement; and that an assured confidence in God will foster pride. But, if both be combined, as they ought to be, in our hearts, we shall possess that most desirable of all attainments, a childlike spirit[c]. Nothing servile will remain. "The fear that has torment will be swallowed up in love[d]," whilst that which flows from love will be in full activity. We shall rejoice evermore in the God of our salvation; but shall "rejoice with trembling[e];" not "boasting as if we had put off our armour,"

[y] Isai. xl. 27, 28. [z] ver. 14—16. [a] Isai. xiv. 2.
[b] Rev. v. 8. [c] Mark x. 15. [d] 1 John iv. 18.
[e] Ps. ii. 11.

armour," but girding it upon us for fresh encounters, till we have accomplished our warfare, and are crowned with everlasting victory.]

DXXII.

MESSIAH'S SUFFERINGS AND SUPPORTS.

Isai. l. 5—9. *The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; Who will contend with me? let us stand together: Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; Who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.*

IN considering the prophecies, we often find, that the mystical or prophetical sense is in reality the most literal; and that on some occasions, however the Prophets may appear to speak of themselves, their words have little, if any, reference to themselves, and must be understood in reference to the Messiah alone. This is particularly observable in the passage before us. We may indeed suppose the prophet very remotely to speak of his own ministry, and to hint at his own trials and consolations: but it is obvious, that the expressions cannot with any propriety be applied in their stricter sense to any but the Messiah, in whom they were most literally fulfilled. The prophet Isaiah, it is true, was more fully instructed in Divine truth than any other of the Prophets; and he abounds more in consolatory promises to the weary and heavy-laden[a]: but still we are constrained to pass him over, as having no sufficient ground to be noticed in the words before us; and we must fix our attention exclusively on the Messiah, of whom they speak. We notice in them,

I. His sufferings—

These were indeed both great and various—

[Not

[a] ver. 4.

[Not to enter into the consideration of them at large, we shall notice only those which are here brought to our view.

"He gave his back to the smiters."—Scourging was no part of the punishment of those who were crucified. The thieves who were crucified with our Lord, were not scourged: and *he* was scourged *in order to prevent* his crucifixion[b]. But a great variety of things which had no necessary connexion with each other, yea, and some which could not except by a miraculous interposition be combined together, were to meet in him: though therefore he was to be crucified, (which yet was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment,) he was also to be scourged: and most cruelly, as another prophecy declares, was this punishment inflicted on him, "the plowers plowing upon his back, and making long furrows there[c]."

"He gave his cheeks also to them that plucked off the hair."—When the ambassadors of David were, by the command of the king of Ammon, deprived of half their beards, they considered it as so great an indignity, that they were quite ashamed; and they were ordered to tarry at Jericho till their beards were grown[d]. But the indignity offered to our Lord was united with much cruelty; for they blindfolded him, and smote him with their hands, and plucked off the hair from his face, and insultingly asked, "Prophesy, thou Christ; Who is it that smote thee[e]?"

But besides the scourging, and plucking off his hair, we are told, They spat in his face; "He hid not his face from shame and spitting."—Now in Eastern countries it is deemed an insult even to spit upon the ground in the presence of another: what then must it be to spit in his face? If a person would be so degraded by it as to be rendered fit to be excluded from the camp of Israel[f], what an inconceivable humiliation was it to the Son of God to be so treated! Yet thus he was treated, both in the palace of the high priest, and in Pilate's judgment-hall, and that too by the lowest of the populace. How amazing it is, that, when Uzzah had been struck dead upon the spot for only touching the ark, which was a symbol of the Deity, such daring offenders as these, who so insulted the incarnate Deity himself, should escape, as it were, with impunity! But such were the sufferings which, as our Surety, Jesus was ordained to bear; and they all came upon him in due season.]

But he willingly undertook to sustain them all—

[Because in the verse preceding our text the "wakening of his ear" is mentioned, it is generally supposed that the expression of "opening his ear" is of exactly the same import. But we apprehend that the former expression refers to

[b] John xix. 1, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 15.
[c] Ps. cxxix. 3.
[d] 2 Sam. x. 4, 5.
[e] Luke xxii. 63, 64.
[f] Numb. xiv. 12.

to his *preparation for* his great office, and the latter to *the engagement which he made* to sustain and execute it. In this view there is a peculiar importance in it, especially as introducing the account of all his sufferings; and it is exactly parallel to a passage in the Psalms, where the same subject is treated of[g]. David, beyond a doubt, refers to the appointment of God, that the slave, who, instead of claiming his liberty at the sabbatic year, should choose to continue in his master's service, should have his ear bored to the door-post with an awl by his master, and should never afterwards be free. Thus our blessed Lord undertook to execute all that was necessary for our redemption; and submitted, as it were, to have "his ear opened," in token that he would never recede from his engagements. Accordingly we find, that, in the most trying circumstances, he "never turned back;" but, on the contrary, when the time for enduring them was arrived, "he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem[h]." It is true, he prayed for the removal of the bitter cup, if men could possibly be saved without his drinking it: but at the same time he submitted to drink it, saying, "Not my will, but thine, be done[i]." And again, when so oppressed in spirit that he knew not what to do, he said, "And now, Father, what shall I say? Save me from this hour? No: for this cause came I unto this hour: Father, glorify thy name[k]." At the time of his apprehension in the garden, he proved, by striking all his enemies to the ground with a word, that he could, if he chose, deliver himself from them; but he then meekly gave himself up into their hands, requiring only the peaceful dismission of his servants[l]. Thus manifestly did he shew that all his sufferings were voluntary, and that he endured them all in *obedience* to his Father's will[m].]

But in this same prophecy we have occasion to notice,

II. His supports—

In the whole of his Mediatorial work he acted as the servant of the Father[n]; in whom he confided, and by whom he was assured of,

1. Effectual succour—

[The Father had promised to uphold him under all his sufferings[o]———and on this promise he relied. Behold, how repeatedly, and with what assurance he asserts, "The Lord God will help me!" and with what triumph he defies his

[g] Compare Ps. xl. 6—8. & Heb. x. 5—7. with Exod. xxi. 6.
[h] Luke ix. 51. [i] Matt. xxvi. 39. [k] John xii. 27, 28.
[l] John xviii. 4—8. [m] Phil. ii. 8. [n] Isai. xlix. 3. John xiv. 31.
[o] Isai. xlii. 1, 6. & at large: Ps. lxxxix. 19—29.

his bitterest enemies; "Who will contend with me? let us stand together: Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me:" I fear none of their accusations; for "He is near that justifieth me." I dread not any sentence of theirs; for I know that they cannot finally prevail against me; "I know that I shall not be ashamed or confounded:" My "strength shall be according to my day;" and therefore "I set my face as a flint" against all the powers both of earth and hell.—Yes, this assurance comforted and strengthened him, under all his trials; "I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved[p]." Hence arose that calmness and composure which so astonished Pilate: "How is it that thou wilt not answer me a word: knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee?" No, says our Lord; "thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."]

2. A triumphant issue—

[Already did he see his enemies vanquished, even when they supposed themselves to have triumphed over him: he saw that in every conflict he should be victorious; and that even his deepest humiliations should be attended with unquestionable demonstrations of his righteous character. In the midst of his trial, his very Judge was constrained to proclaim his innocence: and, whilst he yet hanged upon the cross, both heaven and earth bare testimony to him as a suffering God. At the appointed season, after his dissolution, he was "proved to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead." His ascension also to the right hand of God in the presence of his Disciples, and his sending down the Holy Ghost to testify of him, effectually removed the scandal of his cross, and proved him to be the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world. All this he foresaw; and the foresight of it enabled him to sustain the accumulated load of all his sufferings. He foresaw that his enemies would all "wax old as a garment, and that the very moth should eat them up;" whilst he and his cause should live for ever. And what now is become of the Chief Priests and Elders, or of Pilate his Judge? Yea, what is become of the Jewish nation itself, and of the whole Roman empire? They are all vanished: but "Christ liveth, and is alive for evermore;" and his kingdom is established in the world, and shall shortly be extended over the face of the whole earth. The prospect of this, I say, supported our adorable Emmanuel through all his sufferings; as an inspired Apostle also has informed us: it was "for the joy that was set before him," of ransoming and saving a ruined world, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame;" and "he

[p] Ps. xvi. 8.

"he is now set down on the right hand of the throne of God[q]."]

Let us now pause, and CONTEMPLATE this holy sufferer,

1. As the predicted Saviour of the world—

[What was there in the whole book of prophecy which he did not fulfil? However contradictory in appearance the predictions were, every, the minutest of them, has been accomplished in him. He did not give up the ghost till he could say, in reference to them all, "It is finished." The particulars mentioned in our text, we see recorded in the Gospels: we see also the stedfastness with which he pursued his course, and the complete triumph of his cause in the world. Let us look to him then as the appointed Saviour: let us assure ourselves that he is able to save us to the uttermost. Let our confidence be in him, as his was in his Father: "let us live by him, as he lived by his Father:" and let us not doubt, but that, through the merit of his blood and the efficacy of his grace, we shall triumph even as he has triumphed, and be partakers of his kingdom and glory for evermore.]

2. As the great pattern of all holy obedience—

[In the whole of his life, and especially in his sufferings, he was intended to be a pattern and example to us[r]. What if we be not treated precisely as he was, in scourging, and smiting, and spitting, we may be assured that we shall in some respect or other have both shame and suffering to endure for him. All his followers are, and must be, cross-bearers: "if men called the Master Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." Let us therefore "arm ourselves with the mind that was in him[s]:" and especially let us maintain the same holy confidence in our God. This is assuredly both our duty and our privilege[t]; and we may comfort ourselves with this reflection, that, "if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together."]

[q] Heb. xii. 2. [r] 1 Pet. ii. 21. Heb. xii. 3. [s] 1 Pet. iv. 1.
[t] Rom. viii. 33—39. Mark the peculiar correspondence of this passage with the text, both in spirit and expression.

DXXIII.

A DISSUASIVE FROM THE FEAR OF MAN.

Isai. li. 7, 8. *Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law: Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings: for the moth shall eat*

eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

OUR heavenly Father, anxious that we should attend to his word in every thing, uses various means to impress it on our minds: sometimes he issues his commands with authority, and enforces them with threatenings of his displeasure: at other times he exhorts with more than parental tenderness, and persuades us with the most encouraging considerations. Thus, in the chapter before us, he says no less than three times, "Hearken to me, O my people[a]!" In that spirit we would now address you. It is in Jehovah's name that we speak, yea, and in his very place and stead[b]: and we intreat you to listen with an obedient ear, whilst we guard you against one of the most dangerous snares in which Satan entangles the souls of men. We invite your attention then to the words of our text, and beg you to consider,

I. The fact here supposed—

The supposition does certainly at first sight appear strange—

[Had it been intimated, that persons professing religion and at the same time dishonouring it by their conduct, would be objects of reproach, it would have been nothing but what we might reasonably expect; because hypocrisy is more detestable than even the most flagrant vice: but that persons "in whose heart is God's law," and who consequently reverence and obey all the commandments of God, should be reviled and hated, seems almost incredible. We should be ready to think that such persons would rather be universally loved and honoured, not only because all occasion of blame is cut off from them, but because there is in them an assemblage of all that is virtuous and praise-worthy.]

But the fact supposed is common in all ages—

[The very first-born of the human race hated and murdered his own brother, for no other cause than his superior piety: and it was on similar grounds that Ishmael mocked and derided his brother Isaac. Our blessed Lord experienced similar treatment from the men of his day; and has taught all his followers to expect the same. After portraying the character

[a] ver. 1, 4, 7. [b] 2 Cor. v. 20.

racter of his people in a great variety of particulars, he adds, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate and revile you[c]." We are ready to wonder that such an expression should be introduced in such a connexion; but a little observation will suffice to convince us that that addition was not made without reason.]

Nor is it difficult to account for this fact—

[*The natural man hates God*[d]; and consequently hates his image, wherever it appears———Moreover, *men have established a false standard for judging;* viewing things only in reference to *this present life.* What wonder then if they account those to be fools and mad, who disregard the things of time and sense, and look only to the things that are invisible and eternal? But, in condemning the godly, *they are actuated also in no small degree by self-defence.* It is obvious, that, if the godly be right, the ungodly must be wrong: yea, if there be only a remote probability that the godly *may* be right, the ungodly *must* be wrong, because they do not pause to examine carefully into the truth or falsehood of their own opinions. Hence the ungodly decide at once, and load the godly with revilings and reproach, as the only, or, at least, the easiest way of justifying their own conduct.]

The existence of this fact being clearly ascertained, let us contemplate,

II. The advice here given in reference to it—

Here let us notice,

1. The advice itself—

[The human mind naturally shrinks back from revilings and reproach: and well it may, when any thing really disgraceful is imputed to us. Such a regard to the opinions of men, so far from being wrong, is truly amiable and praiseworthy; and a want of it would argue extreme degeneracy, and inveterate corruption. None but those who are hardened with pride, and insensible to shame, will ever presume to set public opinion at defiance. But where "the revilings and reproach" are wholly unmerited, and we have the testimony of our own consciences that we are "persecuted only for righteousness' sake," we may then discard all fear, and all concern about the ignominy to which we are exposed[dd]. In such a case we do well to "set our face as a flint against the whole world," and even to glory in the reproaches that are cast upon us. Under such circumstances we do not hesitate to repeat the advice which God himself gives us in the text, "Fear not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings."

[c] Matt. v. 3—11. & Luke vi. 20—23. [d] Rom. viii. 7.

[dd] This distinction is made by St. Peter. 1 Pet. iv. 14—16

revilings." We would not so entirely exclude all prudential considerations as to prescribe exactly the same line of conduct to all persons; because we can conceive many situations in which reserve and caution are expedient, with a view to greater ultimate good: but in all cases, and under all circumstances, the fear of man must be put away; and we must follow what we believe to be the true line of our duty, even though the whole world should combine to censure and condemn us.]

2. The considerations with which it is enforced—

[What is man, or what is his reproach, that we should be afraid of any thing that he can say? Let him carry his enmity to the uttermost, he can do no more than kill the body: our spiritual and eternal interests are wholly out of his reach[e]: and, in a little time, the proudest persecutor will be as impotent as the worm he treads on: "the very moth shall eat him up like a garment." What is become of those who, in different and distant ages, have set themselves against the Lord and his Christ? they are swept away, and "gone to their own place." But the Gospel which they opposed, still survives and flourishes, and proves at this day as effectual for the salvation of men as ever. The doctrine of a crucified Saviour is still as precious as at any period of the world: it still avails to heal the wounds which sin has inflicted, and to fill with light and peace and joy the souls of the weary and heavy-laden. And, whilst the Gospel itself continues unchanged, what is now the state of those who once suffered reproach for the Gospel sake? Are they the less happy on account of what they once endured? or do they now regret that they exposed themselves to ignominy and contempt for the sake of Christ? No: their felicity has been inconceivably enhanced by every persecution they endured; and throughout all eternity will they rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for their Redeemer's sake[ee].

What reason then have we to fear enemies who are so incapable of inflicting on us any serious injury, and over whom our triumph will be so speedy, so complete, so certain, so glorious? The smallest reflection on the eternal states of the oppressors and oppressed will surely reconcile us to any thing that we may be called to suffer in our way to heaven.]

Let us now ADD a word,

1. Of caution—

[Whilst we exhort all to despise reproach, we must intreat

[e] Luke xii. 4, 5.

[ee] See these different states described, Isai. lxvi. 5. and lxv. 13, 14.

intreat you so to walk, as not to *merit* it. If persons professing godliness act in any respect unworthy of their profession, they bring contempt, not on themselves only, but on religion itself; and the very "truth of God will be evil spoken of through their means." It is possible too to bring just reproach on ourselves, by indulging in needless singularities. Religion is a wise and sober thing; and is calculated to "make us perfect in every good work." We would intreat you therefore to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against you," and to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way." If you profess to "know righteousness," let your whole conduct prove that the "law of God is in your heart." This is of such infinite importance, that we cannot forbear urging it upon you after the example of God himself; "Hearken to me, hearken to me, hearken to me, O my people!"]

2. Of encouragement—

[Though we are to *expect* nothing but revilings and reproach for our fidelity to God, it is possible that we may in reality be honoured for that very conduct, which, in appearance, has exposed us to shame: for there is something in a holy and consistent life which carries a secret conviction to the minds of our accusers, and tends not only to silence[f], but to win, them[g]. And, though we can never hope that an unconverted man shall *love* us, we may hope that he shall "*be at peace with* us[h]," and even become a witness for us against those who yet load us with their reproaches[i]. But, however this may be, man's judgment is but for *a day*[k]; and then the Lord's time will come, and our righteousness will shine forth as the noon-day[l]. Be contented then to follow your Divine Master, and to bear your cross as he has done before you: and be assured, that "if you suffer with him, you shall also be glorified together[m]."]

[f] 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15. [g] 1 Pet. iii. 1. [h] Prov. xvi. 7.
[i] Luke xxiii. 14, 15, 22. [k] See 1 Cor. iv. 3. The Greek.
[l] 1 Cor. iv. 5. [m] 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. Rom. viii. 17.

DXXIV.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS.

Isai. liv. 6—10. *The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting*

everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

THE covenant of grace, as securing to the Believer all the blessings of time and eternity, is not considered by any means so much as the importance of it demands. There is in the minds of the generality, a jealousy respecting it, so that they can scarcely bear to hear the subject stated as it is in the holy Scriptures. But we must not conceal any thing; and least of all should we keep back from you that which is the fountain and foundation of all the other blessings which you either have or hope for. Certain it is that there is a covenant, called in my text "The covenant of God's peace;" the provisions of which are here set before us with singular force and clearness.

The whole passage may be considered,

I. In reference to the Jewish Church—

[To them it primarily refers. The Jewish Church is here represented as a repudiated wife, put away for her unfaithfulness to her Maker, who calls himself "her husband[a]." Great and manifold were her offences against him: and most justly did she merit the displeasure with which on different occasions she was visited. In the days of the Judges she was often delivered up to her enemies, who oppressed her with the heaviest yoke of bondage: at last she was sent into captivity in Babylon: and at this hour is Jerusalem a desolation, having for eighteen centuries been trodden down of the Gentiles, and left without a temple, or priest, or sacrifice, or any ordinance whatever.

Yet is she not finally cast off. Her Divine Husband yet remembers *his* covenant-engagements, though she has forgotten *hers;* and *his* oath will he fulfil, though she has violated *hers* in ten thousand instances. His wrath against her, though so richly merited, is "small and transient;" whilst the mercies which he has prepared for her are "great" and "everlasting." "He has yet thoughts of love and peace towards her;" and will in due season restore her to her former privileges; yea, and load her with benefits far beyond any which she ever before

[a] ver. 5.

before enjoyed. The very "sun shall be ashamed, and the moon confounded," in the day that he shall visit her with his mercies; so utterly will all creature enjoyments be swallowed up and annihilated by the manifestations of his love[b]———

Of this he graciously assures her, by a two-fold representation; first, *in a way of comparison*, and then *in a way of contrast*. At the time of the Deluge, God promised with an oath to Noah, that he would no more deluge the earth: and appointed the rainbow itself (which, as being a reflection of the rays of the sun from the drops of rain, marked the actual descent of rain at the time) to be a pledge that he would fulfil his word. *In like manner*, says God, "I have sworn to thee, that I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee" to thy utter ruin: and thou mayest regard the very afflictions with which I visit thee, as a pledge of thy future restoration: for "I will not make a full end of thee; though I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished[c]." Again: Of all things which may be deemed stable upon earth, the hills and the mountains may be regarded as the most firm and immoveable: but, says God, the hills and mountains have been, and shall be, removed: but *it shall not be so with you;* for "the covenant of my peace shall never be removed."

The manner in which God speaks of himself, whilst announcing this determination, is yet further worthy to be noticed: for he does not call himself by any name that would inspire fear and terror, but by names importing the most tender love: not "The Lord" *thy Creator*, thy *Governor*, thy *Judge;* but, "The Lord *thy Redeemer*," "the Lord *that hath mercy on thee.*"

Now it is this view of the covenant which encourages us in all our efforts for the conversion of the Jews: for we know infallibly, that they are not cast off for ever; that they are still beloved of God for their fathers' sakes; and that in due time they shall be engrafted in again upon their own olive-tree, and experience, both in a temporal and spiritual view, such prosperity as they never yet enjoyed even under Solomon himself. Our trust is, not in any efforts of man, but in the power and fidelity of God. And though in their present condition they are as dry bones, very dry, reduced to dust, and scattered over the face of the earth, yet are we sure, that by the simple preaching of the Gospel to them they shall arise, a whole army[d]. Yes, "the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this:" as we are assured by many similar declarations of the prophet Jeremiah[e]———]

But

[b] Isai. xxiv. 23. & xxx. 26. See the glories of that period described in ver. 11, 12. compared with Isai. lx. 13—22.

[c] Jer. xxx. 11. [d] Ezek. xxxvii. 1, 2, 10.

[e] Jer. xxxi. 35—37. & xxxiii. 23—26.

But the passage must also be explained,

II. In reference to the Christian Church—

We do not approve of limiting to the Church of Christ a multitude of prophecies which belong primarily to the Jewish Church. On the other hand, we must not rob the Christian Church of that interest which she has in them. It is observable, that the very first verse of this chapter is cited by St. Paul as applicable to the Christian Church[f]: and at the close of the chapter all the rich promises contained in it are said to belong to her: "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord (whoever they may be); and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord[g]." Now,

The Christian Church stands in the relation of a Spouse to Christ—

[So it is represented through the whole Book of Canticles—So it is declared by the Psalmist[h]—The same is affirmed by our Lord himself[i]— and by all his Apostles[k] — — —]

But too often does she provoke the Lord to hide his face from her—

[How often have the Church at large, and every member of it in particular, alienated their hearts from God, and adulterously placed on the creature those affections which were due to him alone! — — — Too true is that accusation which he brings against us, that "we have played the harlot with many lovers[l]" — — —]

What then might we not expect, if God should deal with us according to our iniquities? What, but that he should cast us off, and swear in his wrath that we should never more be received into his favour?]

Yet still does "God remember his covenant" towards her—

["He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever." He will not break his covenant, though we have broken ours: nor will he violate his oath, though we have violated ours times without number. "He will visit our transgressions with the rod, and our iniquity with stripes:" (and, if the chastising us with whips will not suffice, he will chastise us with scorpions, even seven-fold more, for our sins:")

[f] Gal. iv. 26, 27. [g] ver. 17. [h] Ps. xlv. 10, 11.
[i] Matt. ix. 15. [k] John iii. 29. Eph. v. 32. Rev. xxi. 9.
[l] Jer. iii. 1.

sins[m]:) "nevertheless his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from us, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail: his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips: for once he has sworn by his holiness that he will not lie unto David[n]." He knew what we were, and what we should be also, if left to ourselves, before he chose us: yet did he bid us live, and spread his skirt over us, and entered into covenant with us[o]. It was on this very account that he in his covenant undertook to do for us all that related either to the pardoning of our guilt, or to the sanctifying of our nature[p]; and engaged, not only never to depart from us, but never to leave us to depart from him[q]. Of all this he has assured us "by promise and by oath, on purpose that by these two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have the strongest consolation, if we have fled for refuge to the hope that is set before us[r]." If our continuance in his favour had depended altogether on our stability, who would ever be saved at last? (It is of *the grounds* of our security that we are now speaking, and not of *the means:* of *them* we shall speak in another place.) Our final stability must be the work of his grace, as much as our first inclination to serve him: all our good works from first to last must be wrought in us by him[s]: and when he chose us, he chose us to *the end* and to *the means;* or rather *to the end by the means*[t]: and "his gifts and calling are without repentance[u]." Our security then rests upon the unchangeableness of our God[x], "whose compassions fail not[y]," and "with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning[z]." I again repeat, that he may hide himself from us, and for a long period too, as it may appear to us; for it is both his right and his property to do so[a]: but "his anger" will endure but for "a little moment;" and though our "weeping may endure for a night, joy shall come to us in the morning[b]."]

In a REVIEW of this subject,

1. Let none, however desolate their condition may be, indulge despair—

[This is the true use to be made of this important subject. Let not Jews despair of being restored to the favour of their God; but let them plead with God, as their forefathers did[c]———— and accept the invitation which God himself has given them to return unto him[d].

Nor

[m] 1 Kin. xii. 11. Lev. xxvi. 18.
[n] Ps. lxxix. 30—35.
[o] Ezek. xvi. 6, 8. Isai. xlviii. 8.
[p] Jer. xxxi. 11, 12.
[q] Jer. xxxii. 39—41.
[r] Heb. vi. 17, 18.
[s] Isai. xxvi. 12.
[t] 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.
[u] Rom. xi. 29.
[x] Mal. iii. 6.
[y] Lam. iii. 22.
[z] Jam. i. 17.
[a] Isai. xlv. 15.
[b] Ps. xxx. 5.
[c] Isai. lxiii. 15, 16.
[d] Jer. iii. 12—14.

Nor let Christians who are under the hidings of God's face despond. Let not any of you ask, like David, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? This were only to betray your own infirmity[e]," and to shew your utter ignorance of God[f] ———

You will say then, What shall we do? I answer, Lay hold on God's covenant, and look to him to fulfil every part of it. Approach your God with penitential sorrow, as the Church of old did; "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. Yet do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of thy glory; remember, *break not thy covenant with us*[g]. See how David pleaded under similar circumstances[h]: and resolve, as the prophet Isaiah teaches you, "I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him[i]."]

2. Let none, however confident of their state before God, be guilty of presumption—

[Of the book of God's decrees we know nothing, but as it is made visible by facts. Respecting any man's election to eternal life, we can judge only by his works. One thing is clear; that "he who committeth sin is of the devil;" and "he that doeth not righteousness is not of God[k]." Hence, if we are living in the wilful commission of any one sin, or habitual neglect of any one duty, we have no ground whatever to imagine that we are of the number of God's elect. To fancy therefore that a work of grace has been begun in us, and to conclude from thence that God will carry it on unto the end, whilst daily experience proves that it is not carrying on, but that we are the willing slaves of sin and Satan, is only to deceive our own souls, and to surrender up ourselves an easy prey into the hands of our great adversary. Our wisdom is, to seek an union with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith; and not to be dreaming of privileges which we do not possess: for, as it is certain, on the one hand, that no man can be saved who lives in any allowed sin, so it is equally certain, on the other hand, that no one can ever perish who flees to Christ for refuge, and relies altogether upon him for "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." This then must be our daily work: and so far is the covenant of grace from superseding this duty, that it affords us our greatest encouragement to perform it; because it assures us, that we shall "never seek God's face in vain," and that "they

[e] Ps. lxxvii. 7—10. [f] Isai. xl. 28—31. & xlix. 14—16.
[g] Jer. xiv. 20, 21. [h] Ps. xxvii. 9. [i] Isai. viii. 17.
[k] 1 John iii. 8, 10.

" they who trust in him shall never be confounded." Whilst therefore I would say to the trembling Believer, Look to " *the covenant*, which is ordered in all things and sure[1]," and expect God to fulfil all the promises of it to your souls; to the Unbeliever I would say, Look to *the Lord Jesus Christ*, to wash you from your guilt, and to renew you by his Spirit. Respecting the provisions of the covenant trouble not yourselves, till you have an evidence in your own souls that you desire deliverance from sin as much as freedom from condemnation: and get your souls well instructed in a thorough experience of the first principles of repentance and faith, before you presume to build your hopes either on the secret decrees of heaven, or on any fallacious arguments deduced from them.]

[1] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

DXXV.

PEACE THE FRUIT OF DIVINE TEACHING.

Isai. liv. 13. *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.*

THE Jewish Church was often in a state of great distress, under the judgments of Almighty God. In Babylon especially was she at the lowest ebb of degradation and misery. But there was consolation provided for her in a prospect of glorious times, when her light, and peace, and joy, and purity, should far exceed any thing which she had ever experienced in her most prosperous state; and the whole Gentile world also should be made partakers of her blessedness.

In the words before the text, the Jewish Church are represented as a tent or tabernacle torn and " tossed by the winds," and reduced to a most desolate condition: and a promise is given to her, that God will build her as a palace, every part of which shall be composed of precious stones; " her foundations being of sapphires, her windows of agates, her gates of carbuncles, and even her borders, or outward walls, of pleasant stones[2]." In her former state, her whole service consisting of rites and ordinances, she was forced to receive her instructions from *men*, whose peculiar duty was to ascertain and execute

[2] ver. 11, 12.

execute the will of God in every one of his appointments: and in the performance of these burthensome rites there was but *little satisfaction* to the soul. But in the state to which she was encouraged to look forward, a different system was to prevail: the instruction that was to be conveyed was spiritual; and a compliance with it was to be attended with much delight. Hence it was said to her, "All thy children shall be taught of *God:* and *great* shall be the *peace* of thy children."

The promises here made to the Church relate to the two things which were chiefly wanted under that shadowy dispensation; namely,

I. Divine illumination—

This is a blessing which every human Being needs—

[We may obtain from men and books a speculative knowledge of religion, as well as of any other science: but a spiritual discernment can be given us by God alone. This is declared by an inspired Apostle: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned[b]." In like manner our blessed Lord testifies: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him[c]."

How far this is true or false, it is in the power of every man to ascertain, by his own experience. Let it be tried. Of the leading truths of the Gospel we may suppose the generality of persons to be convinced: they know, that they are sinners; that they need a Saviour; that a Saviour has been provided for them; that a promise of salvation is given to all who will believe in him; and that on those who reject his overtures of mercy the guilt of all their sins must rest for ever. Now then let any man sit down to consider these truths; let him call in the aid of all the most competent instructors he can find: and let him see whether he can, by any efforts of his own, bring himself to a *spiritual perception* of those truths, that is, to such a view of them as shall produce a suitable impression on his mind, and a corresponding effect upon his heart and life. Let him labour as long as he shall see fit: and, after the fullest possible trial, let him declare, whether he has been able to produce in his soul the feelings which were excited in the bosoms of the three thousand on the day of

[b] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [c] Matt. xi. 27.

of Pentecost; and in his whole spirit and temper the same permanent change. If one single person in the universe be found that can effect this, then we are content to acknowledge, that our assertions on this subject are erroneous, and that man does not need the teachings of God's Spirit in order to a spiritual perception of divine truth. But if no such instance ever was, or can be, found, then may we be assured, that "flesh and blood cannot reveal these things" to our souls, and that we can know them only by the teaching of God himself[d].]

This however is promised to us in the Gospel—

[The Spirit of God has undertaken to impart it to our souls. His particular office in the economy of Redemption is, "to testify of Christ[e]," and "to glorify Christ by taking of the things that are his, and shewing them unto us[f]." And in the execution of this office he "convinces the soul of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment[g];" and so convinces of these things as to produce in the soul all the diversified sensations which they are suited to create.

If it be asked, What evidence does any one give, whereby it may be ascertained, whether this promised influence be a reality or a delusion? I answer, This also may be brought to a visible test, by which the whole world may judge of it. The man who truly experiences this teaching, immediately comes to Christ as a sinner, and with deep humiliation and contrition seeks salvation through him alone. This our blessed Lord himself affirms; and affirms it too with *an express reference to the words of our text:* "It is written in the Prophets," says he, "They shall all be taught of God. *Every man* therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father, *cometh unto me*[h]." There is no exception under heaven: the effect of this teaching is invariable and universal. Nay more, it produces a holy energy and determination of mind to come to Christ at all events, and to disregard all the consequences that such a step can possibly involve. This may be seen in the conduct of the apostle Paul, who says, "When it pleased God, who called me by his grace, *to reveal his Son in me*, immediately *I conferred not with flesh and blood*[i]," but proceeded to adopt such measures as I judged most calculated to advance his glory.

This teaching therefore, though invisible in itself, even as the wind, is yet, like the wind, visible in its effects: and "*all* the children of Zion" are privileged to experience it in their souls. The weakest person in the whole creation shall enjoy it, if he will but seek it in faith and prayer. Yes: "what God

[d] Matt. xvi. 17. [e] John xv. 26. [f] John xvi. 14.
[g] John xvi. 7—11. [h] John vi. 45. [i] Gal. i. 15—17.

God has hid from the wise and prudent, he will reveal unto babes; even so, because it seemeth good in his sight[k]."]

Connected with this blessing is,

II. Heavenly peace—

Men, without any Divine teaching, possess what they *call* peace: but it is a state which does not deserve the name of peace, seeing that it is nothing but a stupid insensibility, issuing from a forgetfulness of all their spiritual concerns. Speak to them of death, and judgment, heaven and hell, and their peace vanishes in a moment; and they are ready to desire, like Satan, that they "may not be tormented before their time[l]." But the peace which Christ bestows, and which he emphatically calls *his*[m], is of a very different kind: it is a *positive* sense of acceptance with God, and a rest of the soul in God. This the Believer experiences,

1. In the view of all his past sins—

[So far is he from being appalled by a sight of his sins, that he desires to have them set before him in all their malignity, and with all their numberless aggravations. He feels that a sense of his disease is necessary to an enjoyment of the remedy: and the more he sees his own guilt and helplessness, the more he glories in Christ as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour. The very impossibility of being saved in any other way than through the blood and righteousness of Christ, constrains him to look altogether to Christ, as "the very chief of sinners," who shall to all eternity be held forth as a specimen of what the grace of God could effect[n]. The thought that the extent and riches of redeeming love will be pre-eminently displayed in him, perfectly reconciles him to the idea of having all his sins exposed before the assembled universe; since the Saviour will be most glorified in those whom he has redeemed from the deepest death. Let me not however be mistaken. The Believer is not indifferent to his past sins; (for he mourns over them to his dying hour:) much less does he think it a desirable thing for a person to commit great sins in order that Christ may be magnified in the forgiveness of them; (for that would be to make Christ himself "a minister of sin[o]:") but seeing that his sins have been great, he derives consolation from the thought, that "where sin has abounded, the grace of Christ shall much more abound; and that,

[k] Matt. xi. 25. [l] Matt. viii. 29. [m] John xiv. 27.
[n] 1 Tim. i. 16. [o] Gal. ii. 17.

that, as sin has reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord[p].]

2. In the view of all his present infirmities—

[These would quite overwhelm his spirits, if his eyes were not opened to see on what "a Mighty One help had been laid for him[q]." He could not hope to maintain his peace one hour, but that he knows he has an Advocate with the Father, ever ready to intercede for him; and that that very "Advocate is also a propitiation for all his sins[r]." In Christ too he beholds a fulness of grace treasured up for him; of grace ever ready, and all-sufficient for him, in his greatest necessities. Hence, so far from being discouraged by a sense of his weakness, he even derives consolation and encouragement from it; just as St. Paul did, who says, "I *take pleasure* in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong[s]." The thought that "the strength of Christ will be made perfect," and manifested to be perfect, "in his weakness," turns the sense which he has of his weakness into a ground of joy, and makes him even to "glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him[t]."]

3. In the view of the final judgment—

[The bar of judgment is no longer an object of dread and terror to his soul. "He knows in whom he has believed; and is persuaded that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him[u]." He has no fear that God will forget his promises, or that the Saviour who bought him with his blood, and furnished him with continual supplies of grace, will give him up to that destroyer, from whose power he has rescued him at so great a price. He looks on that day as the time appointed for his complete deliverance. He knows that *then* the body, which has here been such a clog to his soul, shall be made a partaker with the soul, in all the glory and felicity of heaven. He looks forward therefore to it with joy. It is as much the object of hope to him, as the first advent of the Saviour was to the Jewish Church. How delightful is it to him to contemplate the wonders of that day; to behold the Saviour coming in all the glory of his Father, and all his holy angels with him; to behold him seated on his judgment-seat; and ordering to either hand the sheep and the goats; to hear him pronounce the sentence upon each, and then to ascend with him in sweet anticipation to the realms of bliss; to be seated on his throne; to behold his glory in all its brightness; to hear his voice, to taste his love, to participate his glory; and

[p] Rom. v. 20, 21. [q] Ps. lxxxix. 19. [r] 1 John ii. 2.
[s] 2 Cor. xii. 10. [t] ib. ver. 9. [u] 2 Tim. i. 12.

and to spend eternity in songs of praise! All this is delightful to the Believer's soul; and in the anticipation of it he already possesses a foretaste of the heavenly bliss.

With these views "his peace is *great*:" yes verily, he has "a peace that passeth all understanding[x]:" and "rivers of it flow into his soul[y]," being "filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abounding in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost[z]."]

SEE then, Brethren,

1. What blessings are treasured up for you in the Gospel—

[It is to "Zion's Children" that these blessings are limited: and how are you to be brought into that relation to her, but by the Gospel? Know that, if you submit yourselves truly to the voice of God in his word, all these blessings are yours: you shall have that "unction of the Holy One that shall teach you all things[a];" and you shall possess the consolations of the Spirit, which are neither few nor small[b]. But remember, that "God will be inquired of, before he will impart them to you[c]: it is by the holy violence of prayer that they must be brought down from heaven; and by the appropriating energy of faith that they must be made available for your salvation———]

2. How injurious are the workings of unbelief—

[Unbelief puts far from us the promises of God, under an idea that we have no title to them; and deprives the soul of all the happiness which it is privileged to enjoy. In vain does God say, "*All*" thy children shall be taught of God: for unbelief has found out some reason for an exception in this or that particular person. In vain has God said, "Great shall be the peace" of thy children: for unbelief suggests, that trouble and fear are more suited to the case of this particular individual. I do not mean to say, that wilful and habitual sin is not a bar both to the teachings and consolations of the Spirit: for *that* will assuredly cut off all gracious communications from us; as it is said, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God[d]:" but, if we truly turn to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, no past iniquities are any bar to our acceptance with him; nor are any present infirmities a ground for desponding fears; seeing that there is a sufficiency in Christ for all our wants; and our very necessities afford him a more glorious occasion for magnifying himself in our support. Dismiss then all doubts and fears respecting your right to apprehend the promises of God, or your

[x] Phil. iv. 6. [y] Isai. xlviii. 17,18. [z] Rom. xv. 13.
[a] 1 John ii. 20, 27. [b] Job xv. 11. Jer. xxx. 19. [c] Ezek. xxxvi. 37.
[d] Isai. lix. 2.

your title to expect his promised blessings. Only "be strong in faith, giving glory to God[e];" and "according to your faith it shall be done unto you[f]."]

[e] Rom. iv. 20. [f] Matt. ix. 29.

DXXVI.

CHRIST A WITNESS AND COMMANDER.

Isai. lv. 4. *Behold, I have given him for a Witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people.*

AMONGST the various means which God used for the spiritual benefit of his ancient people, one was, to provoke them to jealousy, by declaring, that the blessings which they so abused should be transferred to another people, who would make a more suitable improvement of them. From the beginning he warned them of this by Moses: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation[a]." Our blessed Lord and his Apostles frequently had recourse to this expedient: and St. Paul tells us, that he had used it, not to irritate his countrymen, but, if possible, to save them[b]. The prophet Isaiah had this object in view, in the passage before us. He has been expostulating with the Jewish people on their folly and impiety in not seeking after the blessings of salvation, and especially those blessings which God had covenanted to bestow upon them through their exalted Messiah[c]; and he tells them, that God had given this Messiah, not, as they imagined, to them only, but to the whole Gentile world; who would eventually run to him, and embrace him, and become the heirs of those benefits, which the ungrateful Israelites neglected and despised.

That it is the Messiah who is here spoken of, there can be no doubt. He is often designated by the name

[a] Deut. xxxii. 21. [b] Rom. xi. 11, 15.

[c] Compare ver. 3. with Acts xiii. 34.

name of David[d]: and "an unspeakable gift" he is to a ruined world[e].

We propose to shew,

I. For what ends he is given—

Doubtless he was sent for the salvation of man; according as it is written, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life[f]." But there are two ends of his incarnation specified in the text; to which therefore we will confine our attention. He was given,

1. "To be a Witness to the people"—

[God had from all eternity devised a plan for the redemption of the world through the sufferings of his only-begotten Son. And of this plan the Lord Jesus Christ came to testify. For this office he was well qualified; having concerted the plan together with his Father; as it is written, "The counsel of peace was between them both[g]."

Of this stupendous mystery the Lord Jesus testified by the Prophets, hundreds of years before he came into the world. Not one word of all that they delivered on this momentous subject proceeded from themselves: "they spoke only as they were moved by the Holy Ghost[h]," and as they were instructed "by an immediate inspiration from God[i]." The Spirit by whose sacred agency they were moved was "the Spirit of CHRIST;" as St. Peter says; "The Prophets, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto us, searched what, or what manner of time, *the Spirit of* CHRIST did signify, when it *testified* beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow[k]." Here both *the subject* and *the author* of their testimony are declared to be precisely such as we have affirmed. It was of the wonders of Redemption that they testified; and the Author of their testimony was JESUS CHRIST.

In due time he came down from heaven, and testified of these things in his own person. He had from all eternity been "in the bosom of his Father[l]," and was privy to every thing which the Father had ordained[m]: and at the appointed season he came, "as a Minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the Fathers[n]:" as St. John informs us; "He that cometh from heaven is above all: and what he hath seen and heard, that he *testifieth*[o]." The

[d] Jer. xxx. 9. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. Hos. iii. 5.
[e] 2 Cor. ix. 15.
[f] John iii. 16.
[g] Zech. vi. 13.
[h] 2 Pet. i. 21.
[i] 2 Tim. iii. 16.
[k] 1 Pet. i. 11.
[l] John i. 18.
[m] John v. 20.
[n] Rom. xv. 8.
[o] John iii. 32.

The light which he cast on this mystery was far greater than that which had been given to the Jewish Church: yet the time was not come for the full disclosure of it: he had many things to say, which the people could not hear whilst he was yet sojourning on earth, because the mystery itself yet remained to be accomplished, by his death, and resurrection and ascension.

He therefore afterwards bore a fuller testimony by his Apostles; who, through that "unction of the Holy One, who taught them all things," and "brought all things to their remembrance," "testified of the Gospel of the grace of God[p]," and "declared the whole counsel of God" respecting it. To this effect St. John says; "We have seen, and *do testify*, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world[q]." The record was the same, by whomsoever it was delivered; namely, "that God has given to us eternal life; and that this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life[r]." By whomsoever it was delivered also, it was equally "the testimony of Christ[s]," both as having him for its Author, and him for its end.

Hence the appropriate name of Christ, as designating the first great object of his Mission, is, "The faithful and true Witness[t]."]

2. To be "a Leader and Commander to the people"—

[Moses, in his day, was a Witness from God, to make known to the Jewish people the Divine will: but Joshua was the Commander, who was to lead them into the Promised Land, and to give them a full possession of their inheritance. The two offices are combined in Christ; who, whilst he is given for a Witness, is also given for "a Leader and Commander to the people." He even appeared to Joshua of old, "as Captain of the Host of the Lord," from whom alone all Joshua's success should spring[u]. And to us also is he revealed under the same blessed character, "The Captain of our salvation[x]." He is at the head of all his people, and goes forth with them to battle: and all who have enlisted under his banners are to fight as "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and to "quit themselves like men[y];" nor are they ever to cease from their conflicts till they have gained the victory[z]. Indeed "through him they shall be more than conquerors[a]:" for he will never leave them, till he has fulfilled to them all that he has undertaken, and put them into possession of their promised inheritance[b].]

From the ends for which he is given, we proceed to shew,

II. The

[p] Acts xx. 24. [q] 1 John iv. 14. [r] 1 John v. 11, 12.
[s] 1 Cor. i. 6. [t] Rev. i. 5. & iii. 14. [u] Josh. v. 14, 15.
[x] Heb. ii. 10. [y] 2 Tim. ii. 3. 1 Cor. xvi. 13.
[z] 1 Tim. vi. 12. [a] Rom. viii. 37. [b] Josh. xxiii. 14.

II. The manner in which he is to be received—

This must correspond with God's design in sending him into the world. He must be received,

1. With a faith that wavers not—

[As he is a Witness to us, we must listen to his testimony with childlike simplicity. If he declare to us the plan of salvation, we must submit to it with the deepest reverence, and not for a moment dispute against it, or attempt to substitute in its place any plan of our own. If he open to us the great and precious promises which God has made in his word, we must rely upon them, and expect their accomplishment with the most assured confidence. If, on the other hand, he denounce the judgments of God against impenitent transgressors, we must tremble at his word, and humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes. As for all that men may say in opposition to his testimony, it must be to us of no greater weight than the dust upon the balance. Our answer must be, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them[c]." To sit at his feet, like Mary, must be the delight of our souls. We must treasure up in our hearts his every word, even as his own Mother did, whilst he was yet a child[d]. We must "meditate on his sayings day and night[e]." They must be "more to us than our necessary food[f]," and "sweeter to us than honey and the honey-comb." If under any circumstances our faith in his word begin to waver, we must be ashamed of ourselves, and mourn for it, as treating him with the greatest dishonour. Such conduct would be deemed an heinous offence even to a creature like ourselves: how much more offensive then must it be to *him!* it is nothing less than "making God a liar." This is the interpretation which God himself puts upon such conduct[g]. Let us dread lest we be found guilty of this sin; and let us "be strong in faith, giving glory to God."]

2. With an obedience that has no reserves—

[The obedience which a soldier owes to his Commander is unbounded. The Commander has only to say, "Come," and he cometh; "Go," and he goeth; "Do this," and he doeth it. He does not think it any excuse for disobedience, that by following the command he shall have to encounter an enemy that will seek his life. On the contrary, the more dangerous the post is that is assigned him, the more he considers himself bound to execute the command with promptitude and zeal: and, if he hesitate through fear, he is deemed unworthy any more to serve his prince: yea, he may account himself

[c] Isai. viii. 20. [d] Luke ii. 51. [e] Ps. i. 2.
[f] Job xxiii. 12. [g] 1 John v. 9, 10.

himself happy, if his life be not also forfeited as the penalty of his transgression. Shall there then be any limit to the obedience which we shall render to our heavenly Leader? Shall his commands be disobeyed through fear, or be executed with a timid trembling mind? Shall not his authority awe us, and his example shame us, into a conduct more worthy of our profession? Shall we not account it rather an honour to suffer for him, and be ready at any time, or in any manner, to lay down our lives for his sake? Yes; we must fight the good fight of faith. We must put on the whole armour provided for us, and go forth "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." We must be studious to learn from day to day, what is his will concerning us; and, once apprised of it, we must set ourselves instantly to obey it. Does it call for self-denial? We should for his sake "mortify the flesh with the affections and lusts." Does it summon us to action? "Whatever our hand findeth to do, we must do it with our might." We must be ever ready to "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach." There is nothing to which he calls us, which He has not himself both done and suffered; *he*, without any obligation on his part, except what his own love had imposed upon him: whereas *we* are bound by our allegiance to the God of heaven, and by all our hopes of acceptance with him in a better world, to "war a good warfare:" for it is only by being "faithful unto death that we can ever obtain the crown of life[h]."

It is said in the words following my text, that the Gentiles to whom this Saviour was given, "should run unto him, and glorify his name." I call on you therefore to verify this prediction, and "not to receive the grace of God in vain." It is in this way only that you can shew to the Jews what blessings you enjoy, and stir them up to seek a participation of them. And in this way alone can you "walk worthy of your high calling," or "render to the Lord according to the benefits he has conferred upon you."]

[h] Rev. ii. 10.

DXXVII.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO TURN TO GOD.

Isai. lv. 7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

WE may discern many of the attributes of the Deity,

Deity, as wisdom, power, and goodness, in the works of creation: but it is from the book of revelation only that we obtain the knowledge of his mercy. The Heathen indeed entertain some faint ideas that God will pardon them; though they know not how to approach him with acceptance, nor have any assurance that they shall find acceptance with him. But we are invited by God himself to come unto him, and are encouraged by an express promise that he will pardon even the vilest of returning prodigals.

In the words before us, we may see,

I. Our duty—

All of us by nature are in a state of departure from God, and of subjection to sin. Hence our duty is,

1. To forsake our sins—

[Every one has some "*way*" which he has marked out for himself; some way that is suited to his age, his education, his circumstances in life, or his constitutional propensities. Some are addicted to open vice; others to a more decent species of gaiety; others to the pursuit of riches; others to the more refined, though not less destructive, gratifications of literary pride; while others again regard nothing but their ease, and the indulgence of their peculiar habits. But whatever be our ways, if they be not such as are prescribed in the Scripture, and such as lead directly to heaven, they must be "forsaken." We may indeed, and must, attend to our earthly duties; but in them, as well as in our religious exercises, we must seek the glory of God, and the salvation of our souls.

We must moreover forsake our "*thoughts*." Even they who are most correct in their conduct, will find abundant matter for humiliation in their "thoughts." What proud thoughts arise even from their supposed superiority to others! What vain, angry, envious, worldly, covetous, impure, and unbelieving thoughts lodge within us all, and find a welcome reception in our hearts! These then, no less than our ways, must be "forsaken:" we must watch and pray against them, and labour to have our minds occupied with holy and heavenly contemplations.]

2. To turn unto our God—

[As it is from God that we have departed, so it is unto God that we must return: nor will any reformation of our lives, or even renovation of our hearts, avail us, if this further change be not accomplished within us.

We

We must turn to him *in humility*. All of us, without exception, are guilty before God. Let us, even the best amongst us, only mark what our thoughts most easily recur to, and what they fix upon with the greatest frequency and delight, in those seasons when there is nothing particular to engage them, and we shall find no great cause for self-preference and self-complacency. Such a view of ourselves would shew us what we are before Him "who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins;" and would convince us that we need to abase ourselves before him with self-lothing and self-abhorrence.

We must also turn to him *in faith*. There is but one Mediator between God and man, whose merits and intercession must be the only grounds of our hope. In him, even in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must trust: we must make mention of his name and of his righteousness, even his only: and we must believe that God, for his sake, is willing to accept the very chief of sinners.

We must yet further turn to him *in an unreserved devotedness both of heart and life*. Mark, how entirely the heart of an unregenerate man gives itself to the world! Not that he never engages in religious duties; but, whatever he does, his affections are set upon things below, and not on things above. The very reverse of this is our duty: we are not to be so occupied with heavenly pursuits, as to neglect the duties of our place and station; but, in the midst of all our earthly occupations, God must have our hearts: his command must be the reason, his word the rule, and his honour the end, of all our actions. To fulfil his will, and enjoy his presence, should be the one object of our lives.]

Nor shall we decline this duty, if we consider what the text proposes for,

II. Our encouragement—

God will "shew mercy" to returning penitents—

[If it were doubtful whether our efforts would prove effectual for our salvation, we should not readily undertake the work of mortifying sin, and of turning unto God. But there is no doubt: for God delighteth in the exercise of mercy: "judgment is his strange work," to which he is utterly averse: "he willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." He invites us and expostulates with us in the most tender manner, "Turn ye: turn ye! why will ye die?" "Wilt thou not be made clean? Oh, when shall it once be?"——— Let but the assurances of mercy which the Scripture affords to penitent sinners be considered, and no one will want a motive for abandoning his sins, and for returning to his God.]

He

He will "abundantly pardon" transgressions, however multiplied they may have been—

[They whose iniquities have been heinous and long-continued, are apt to despond, and to imagine themselves beyond the reach of mercy. But none need to despair: God's mercy is infinite: though our sins may have been numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore, his mercies will far exceed them: "as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him." See what sinners have been forgiven! mark the transgressions of David, Manasseh, Peter, and others; see the peculiar aggravations of their guilt! and then say whether God will not multiply his pardons to the very utmost extent of our necessities?——— After such a view of God's mercy, our hearts must be harder than adamant, if we refuse to repent, and to turn unto him.]

ADDRESS;—To those who

1. Presume upon God's mercy—

[You are at ease, because God is merciful: but are his mercies ever promised to those who live and die in sin? Are not rather his judgments denounced against them? Search the Scriptures, and see if you can find one word to comfort those who persist in wilful impenitence: alas! you will soon find to your cost, that, as God is merciful to repenting sinners, so will he fulfil the declaration, that "except ye repent, ye shall all perish."]

2. Limit it—

[Satan's first device for the retaining of sinners under his dominion is, to represent God to them as a Being who is too merciful to punish them. His next endeavour is, to make them believe that their sins are too great to be forgiven, and that there is not mercy enough in the heart of God to pardon such transgressors as they. But, if any of us are tempted to entertain such thoughts of the Deity, let us only reflect upon the words of the text, and the many passages of Scripture which illustrate and confirm them, and we shall see at once the folly and impiety of limiting his mercies. Let such persons at least put the matter to a trial; and they shall find, by sweet experience, that "whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out."]

3. Abuse it—

[Are there those in the world, who, because they have obtained mercy (as they think), are remiss in "working out their salvation?" Are there those who imagine, that, because they have "once overcome the world, they may be again entangled therein, and overcome" by it, without any danger to their

their souls? Let them know, that they are fatally deluded; and that, if they do not awake from their stupor, "their last end will be worse than their beginning." If the mercy of God do not stimulate us to an unfeigned renunciation of all sin, and an unremitting activity in his service, we shall in vain hope that it shall be exercised towards us in the day of judgment.]

4. Enjoy it—

[What reason have you to admire and adore the goodness of your God! Oh, let a lively sense of it be ever on your minds. Be meditating daily how you shall most acceptably express your gratitude towards him. Labour to glorify him to the uttermost. Commend him to your fellow-sinners. Let your "ways" be such as shall be well-pleasing in his sight. Let your "thoughts" be devoutly occupied in praises and thanksgivings to him. And let your fellowship with him become daily more sweet, more intimate, and more abiding. Thus shall his mercy, which has already abounded towards you, be displayed in yet richer communications to all eternity.]

DXXVIII.

RESEMBLANCE OF THE GOSPEL TO RAIN AND SNOW.

Isai. lv. 10, 11. *As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return vnto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

THE more just our views of God's perfections are, the more firm and enlarged will be our expectations from him. We are apt to distrust his mercy and love, because we "judge him to be such an one as ourselves:" whereas, if we considered how infinitely remote his ways and thoughts are from ours, we should repose the most unlimited confidence in him, and have every fear swallowed up in the contemplation of his power and grace. These considerations are proposed by God himself as an encouragement to us to return from our evil ways; and, in the words before us, we are assured, that the blessings which he will convey to us through the medium of his Word, shall

shall be as free, as certain, as abundant, as those which he imparts to the earth by means of the rain and snow. In illustrating this comparison, we shall trace the resemblance between the Word, and the rain or snow,

I. In their origin—

"The rain and snow come down from heaven"—

[If the whole world should unite their efforts to produce rain, they would never accomplish their end. It is God who forms the clouds, and causes them to water the earth: and therefore to him we must acknowledge ourselves indebted for every shower that falls. Of this we are frequently reminded in the Scriptures[a]: and the gods of the Heathen are challenged, if they can, to exert a similar power, and thus establish their right to the honours ascribed to them[b].]

The Word of the Gospel also "cometh forth out of God's mouth"—

[It proceeded from God *originally:* the words of "prophecy came not of men; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost[c]:" yea, "*all* Scripture," and not the Prophetic parts only, "was given by inspiration of God[d]." Moreover the Gospel, when faithfully preached, is also *at this time* from God. It is God who instructs his servants, and qualifies them to declare his truth: and the word delivered by them is "not the word of man, but in truth the word of God." We mean not to insinuate, that any persons now have *the same kind* of inspiration which was vouchsafed to the Apostles: but every faithful Minister is taught and directed of God what to say, and is assisted in the delivery of his message[e]. As an ambassador of God, he speaks altogether in God's name, and may address every one of his audience in the words of Ehud to Eglon, "I have a message from God to thee[f]."]

But the resemblance between the Word and the rain is yet more strongly marked,

II. In their operation—

The "rain and snow" are the means of rendering the earth fruitful—

[If

[a] Ps. cxlvii. 8. Job xxxviii. 25—28. [b] Jer. xiv. 22.
[c] 2 Pet. i. 21. [d] 2 Tim. iii. 16.
[e] Matt. xxviii. 20. And though we cannot *strictly* apply to ourselves such passages as Mark xiii. 11. and Luke xxi. 14, 15. yet they teach us what assistance to expect from Christ, provided we apply to him *in the diligent use of means.* [f] Judg. iii. 20.

[If the earth be only a few months without rain, the most calamitous consequences ensue[g]: but if the parched and thirsty earth be visited with rain or snow, its vegetative powers are revived, and it yields an abundance of food for man and beast[h]; yea, there is a sufficiency not only for the present consumption, but for "sowing," in order to a future crop.]

The Word of God also is instrumental to the fructifying of the souls of men—

[God has many gracious ends to "accomplish" by his word: sometimes he sends it *to quicken* the dead; and then even "the bones that are dry, very dry," are made to live[i]. Sometimes he sends it *to comfort* the afflicted; and then it proves as balm to the wounded spirit, nor can the most distressed mind withstand its energy[k]. Sometimes he sends it *to sanctify* the polluted; and then the most inveterate lusts give way, and his people are transformed into his image[l]. Finally, by its various operations he determines *to save* the lost; and behold, it stops not short of his purpose; it "prospers in the thing whereto he has sent it," and becomes "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth[m]."

An easterly wind may counteract the benefits which would accrue from the rain; but not all the powers of hell shall be able to defeat the purposes of God, in sending his word: "it never returns unto him void:" weak as it seems to be when delivered by sinful man, it yet is "sharper than any two-edged sword[n];" it "casts down every thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ, and brings into obedience to him" the heart that would resist its power[o].]

Let us LEARN then from this beautiful comparison,

1. The importance of attending the preached Word—

[We know not when it is that God intends to send his word home to our hearts; and therefore we should always be found waiting upon him in the way of his appointment. The man who was healed at the pool of Bethesda had been there many years; and if he had absented himself on the day that Jesus visited the place, he had lost the blessing that was designed for him[p]. However long therefore we may have attended at the house of God, apparently in vain, it becomes us still to tarry the Lord's leisure, and to expect the showers of his grace in due season.]

2. The

[g] See Jer. xiv. 2—6. [h] Ps. lxv. 9—13.
[i] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10. Ps. cxix. 50. Jam. i. 18.
[k] Ps. cvii. 8—20. Deut. xxxii. 2.
[l] John xv. 3. and xvii. 17. Eph. v. 26. [m] Rom. i. 16. 1 Cor. i. 21.
[n] Heb. iv. 12. [o] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. [p] John v. 1—9.

2. The danger of despising it—

[The text, though often interpreted as comprehending God's *judicial* purposes, does not properly relate to them; for, as the rain is not spoken of as deluging the earth, but only of rendering it fruitful, so the parallel between the Gospel and the rain should be drawn only as relating to mercies, and not to judgments. Nevertheless we may notice in this place, that, as God sent his miracles to harden Pharaoh's heart, so he may, and often does, send his word to blind, and harden the hearts of proud opposers. This was the end of the commission given to Isaiah[q]; and, though it was not the *primary* intent of Christ when he preached to the people in parables, it constituted *a part* of his design in relation to the proud, cavilling, and incorrigible Pharisees[r]: and the same end is accomplished, though not *primarily* intended, in respect to thousands of infidels in every age[s]. Beware then, lest God "take you in your own craftiness:" for whether you receive his word or not, "it shall not go forth in vain:" if it be not "a savour of life unto life, it will prove a savour of death unto death[t]."]

3. The benefit of praying over it—

[It is not in the power of man to command a blessing on the word. "Paul may preach in vain, and Apollos water in vain, unless God give the increase[u]." But if we pray to God, he will send us such a word as shall be suited to us; such a word as shall make us ready to think that the Minister has received private information respecting us; such a word as shall discover to us our whole hearts[x], and constrain us to fall down on our faces, and confess that God is indeed present in his ordinances[y]. The Minister may draw the bow at a venture; but God will direct the arrow between the joints of the harness, and cause it to pierce our inmost souls[z]. Let us then pray that God would direct and assist the Minister, and render his word effectual to our good. Thus shall we secure to ourselves a blessing, and, like the refreshed earth, bring forth fruit suited to the culture bestowed upon us[a].]

[q] Isai. vi. 9, 10. [r] Luke viii. 10. [s] Rom. xi. 8. Acts xxviii. 26, 27.
[t] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [u] 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. [x] John iv. 29.
[y] 1 Cor. xiv. 25. [z] 2 Kin. xxii. 34. [a] Heb. vi. 7.

DXXIX.

ACCEPTANCE FOR ALL SINCERE WORSHIPPERS.

Isai. lvi. 4—7. *Thus saith the Lord unto the Eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house, and within*

within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

THE concluding words of our text sufficiently shew the scope of the whole passage. The chapter begins with proclaiming the approach of the Gospel dispensation, under which the way of obtaining righteousness and salvation through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was to be fully revealed[a]. In our text, the admission of all persons to the benefits of that dispensation is insisted on; and it is declared, that "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, whatever may be his disqualifications according to the Law, shall be accepted[b]." Since God has a people scattered over the face of the whole earth, he will now have his Church open for the admission of every Child of man.

In making known these gracious purposes, the prophet sets before us,

I. The character which God approves—

At no period did God ever approve of those who confined their obedience to the observance of any rites or ceremonies: at all times he has spoken the same language; "My Son, give me thy heart." Accordingly in the description which is here given us of those who shall find acceptance with him, there are two marks whereby they are universally distinguished;

1. Their obedience to his will—

[Whatever conflicts they may have sustained in the earlier stage of their Christian experience, the first act which truly and properly designates them the Lord's people is, their "joining of themselves to him" as his people. Till they have done this in sincerity and truth, they cannot be acknowledged

[a] ver. 1. [b] Compare Acts x. 34, 35.

acknowledged as his. There may indeed be circumstances wherein a public devotion of themselves to him cannot be expected; but where the situation of the persons admits of it, there must be an union with the Lord's people, and an open acknowledgment of Christ as their only Lord and Saviour ———

Nor must this be a mere empty profession: those who are upright before God will join themselves to him "to love and serve him" with their whole hearts. All other lords must be renounced; and God alone be honoured and obeyed.

Neither must this change be the result of fear alone: there must be a cordial consent of the will, and "a choosing of the things that please God." There will, it is true, be still "a law in their members warring against the law in their minds:" but the deliberate purpose of their hearts must be to please God; God only, God universally, God always.

In one thing will they be particularly distinguished, that is, their reverence for the sabbath, and their delight in sanctifying it to the Lord. *This* is twice mentioned in our text: and if we bear in mind, that the whole passage relates to the times of the Gospel, we shall see, that the sanctification of the sabbath is a duty of perpetual obligation; and that, however some of the ceremonial observances relating to it under the Law are abrogated, the spiritual improvement of it will characterize the Lord's people to the end of time. Indeed this is one of the most prominent features in all who are truly upright before God: Whilst the world at large make the sabbath a day of carnal ease or pleasure, and the generality of those who profess some regard for it sanctify only a part of it to the Lord, and *that* rather for conscience sake than because they have any pleasure in its duties, the upright devote to God and to the work of their souls the whole of it, and are as eager to improve that day for their spiritual advancement, as the ungodly are to improve the other six days for the advancement of their temporal welfare[c].]

2. Their affiance in his covenant—

[If we could suppose all these dispositions and actions to be united in a man who should disregard the Gospel covenant, they would never secure to the possessor the approbation of his God. The very best of men are sinners before God, and must seek for mercy in the way in which alone it will be vouchsafed. The way which God has appointed, is, through the covenant of grace; in which God has agreed to accept the atonement offered by his only dear Son, and to receive for his sake all who will plead the efficacy of that atonement. If any man think that his own virtues will suffice to recommend him to God, he will be left to suffer the penalty due to his iniquities,

[c] Isai. lviii. 13, 14.

iniquities, and will perish under the accumulated guilt of having despised the salvation offered him in the Gospel. In reading the Scriptures, we shall do well to notice how often "the keeping of God's covenant and his commandments" are united together. Neither of these can by any means be dispensed with: they are both necessary for their respective ends; the one, to obtain mercy with our offended God; and the other, to manifest the sincerity of our faith and love. We must bear in mind therefore, that an humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ is quite as requisite for our acceptance with God, as any obedience to his commands can be; and that "the laying hold of God's covenant" is essential to the character of all who would be approved by him.]

Such being the character portrayed in our text, we proceed to notice the terms in which God has described,

II. The approbation with which he will honour it—

Whatever disadvantages such a person may labour under, God will,

1. Accept him in all his services—

[Eunuchs and strangers were disqualified by the Law from entering into the congregation of Jehovah[d]. But God promises, under the Christian dispensation, to admit all without any exception, provided their dispositions and habits be such as he approves; yea, God himself will "bring them to his holy mountain[e]," by sending his shepherds to search them out, and to bring them upon their shoulders rejoicing.

Moreover, God will "make them joyful in his house of prayer." This is a blessing experienced by none but those who are truly upright. In the house of *preaching* indeed, the vilest hypocrites may be delighted[f]: and it would be well if the undue preference given to preaching, and the late attendance at public worship, observable among religious professors in the present day, did not give reason to fear, that their religion is in their ears only, and not in their hearts. Certain it is, that, amongst those who are truly upright, such conduct would be abhorred: they delight to draw nigh to God, and to pour out their hearts before him: and *this*, not only when some fluent person is exhibiting his gifts, but when the prayers of our Liturgy (better than which were never composed by mortal man) are offered up in the presence of the congregation. The man that has not his heart in tune for such prayers as those, has yet to learn what his wants are, and what should be the posture of his soul before God. To the penitent and contrite soul they will often be as marrow and fatness;

[d] Deut. xxiii. 1—8. [e] Heb. xii. 22. [f] Ezek. xxxiii. 30—32.

fatness; and to join in them will be the sublimest pleasure he can enjoy.

Whilst they "draw nigh to God, God will also draw nigh to them," and will "manifest his acceptance" of them by some special tokens of his love. In former times he often testified his acceptance of the sacrifices by sending fire from heaven, to consume them upon the altar: now he will do the same, as it were, in a more secret way; he will send his Spirit into the soul as a Spirit of adoption, he will "shed abroad his love there," and will fill it with an abundance of grace and peace.]

2. He will number them amongst his most-favoured servants—

[To be childless was, under the Jewish dispensation, accounted a misfortune, and even a disgrace: and persons considered themselves as living in their posterity. Of this happiness the persons addressed in our text were deprived: but God assured them, that "he would give them a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters:" their children, even if they were as numerous as those of Ahab, might be cut off in a few hours, and their inheritance in Israel might be lost: but God would give to them a name and an inheritance that should endure for ever. To every one that answers to the foregoing character is this promise made: and to every one shall it assuredly be fulfilled in its season[g]. Even at this time have they the earnest of these blessings in their souls; and in due time they shall possess them in all their fulness[h].]

IMPROVEMENT—

In this view of our subject we have,

1. An antidote to despondency—

[Those who are upright in heart are still, as formerly, ready to entertain desponding fears, and to imagine that there is something in their situation and circumstances which renders their case peculiarly hopeless. But God delights to encourage such persons with the most consolatory declarations[i]. Let not any then say, "I am a dry tree," or suppose that he is incapable of yielding fruit to God: for those who are "farthest off, may yet be brought nigh by the blood of Christ[k];" and "strangers and foreigners," if they embrace and obey the covenant of grace, shall become "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God[l]."]

2. A stimulus to exertion in the cause of Christ—

[The same principle of unbelief which discourages men in relation to themselves, operates powerfully to repress their exertions for others. The state of the Heathen is thought to present insurmountable obstacles to their conversion. But the

[g] Rev. iii. 12. [h] 1 John iii. 12. [i] Isai. xl. 27, 28.
[k] Eph. ii. 12,13. [l] ib. ver. 19.

the most ignorant savages are not farther from a participation of the Gospel, than eunuchs and strangers were from communion with the Jewish Church: yet *these* have already found access to God: why therefore may not *they?* Indeed we are assured by the prophet, that the remotest Gentiles *shall* be gathered to the Lord[l]; and our Lord himself confirms the joyful truth[m]. Let us then open wide the door of God's House to the Gentile world: let us encourage them to "lay hold on his covenant:" and let us, each according to his ability, labour to hasten forward that glorious day, when all the nations of the earth shall be converted to the Lord, and "become one fold under one Shepherd."]

[m] ver. 8. [n] John x. 16.

DXXX.

THE SERVICES WHICH GOD REQUIRES.

Isai. lviii. 5—11. *Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burthens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry; and that thou bring the poor that are cast out, to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy rear-ward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.*

IT is not uncommon for persons who are hypocrites at heart, to make a great profession of religion, and even to complain of God himself as not recompensing sufficiently their zeal in his cause. The Pharisee in the parable, who boasted of his fastings and his almsgivings, is a just representation of many in the present

present day. But against such characters it is the duty of a Minister to bear the most faithful testimony. The injunction given to the prophet was, "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet; and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." And what were the transgressions that were to be so severely censured? Was it an entire neglect of ordinances? No: it is acknowledged that the people abounded in the externals of religion: "They seek me daily, says God, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." But, in the midst of all this pretended zeal for godliness, they were insincere at heart: their observance of duties proceeded from a principle of pride, and was intended as a cloke for their hidden abominations; their very fasts were nothing but a display of the vilest hypocrisy, which God abhorred. The prophet being commanded to reprobate such odious conduct, states to them what their fasts should be, in order to be accepted and approved by God. In considering his statement, we shall shew,

I. What are the services which God requires—

External services, however humble in their appearance, as "the bowing down of the head like a bulrush, and spreading sackcloth and ashes under us," are not pleasing to God, unless accompanied with dispositions and habits that are suited to them. Especially they must be attended with works,

1. Of justice—

[The Jews, both before and after the Babylonish captivity, were much addicted to extortion and oppression[a]. To make restitution to those whom they had defrauded and reduced to bondage; to refrain from "putting forth the finger" any more in a way of scorn and menace against those whom they had injured, or from deceiving them by "vain promises" of compensation; and "to break entirely every yoke" whereby they had galled and oppressed their brethren; these were the very first acts required to evince the sincerity of their repentance;

[a] Jer. xxxiv. 9—11. with Neh. v. 5.

tance; since with such cruelties not the smallest measure of real penitence could consist.

We bless our God that the reasonableness and necessity of these requisitions have been so far acknowledged, as to lead to the abolition of the Slave-trade by the people of this country. But how dreadful is the thought, that now, when God has vouchsafed to Europe the blessings of peace, there should be a wish expressed to revive a traffic so repugnant to the dictates of humanity! Verily, if God be so requited for his tender mercies, we must expect to see his judgments poured out with ten-fold vengeance on the nations who thus offend him[b].

But let us not overlook the innumerable other acts of injustice and oppression which are found amongst ourselves. They are, it is true, less heinous in their nature than those of which we have been speaking; but still, whether more or less atrocious, they must all be put away, if ever we would find acceptance with a holy God.]

2. Of mercy—

[As mercy is the attribute in which God most delights, so it is that, in which he desires that his people should most resemble him. To "feed the hungry, and clothe the naked," and consider every child of man as a brother whom we regard "as our own flesh;" to take the most destitute of the human race, and "bring him," if occasion so require, "to our own house," for the purpose of affording him more effectual relief; to feel such sympathy with him, as to "draw out," not merely our pecuniary aid, but even "our very souls," for his relief, and so to measure our benevolence as to aim at not merely comforting, but "satisfying his afflicted soul;" *this* is the spirit which God loves: *this* he approves infinitely beyond all outward services, of whatever kind. *This* he esteems as the best proof of a regenerate heart, and the surest evidence of our love to him — — —]

That we may know how pleasing to him these services are, he tells us,

II. What is the reward with which he will recompense them—

There is a very undue jealousy in the minds of many on the subject of our good works, and of charitable actions in particular, being rewarded: they are ready to think that such a doctrine militates against

[b] Preached just as the Articles of Peace, in which a provision was made by the French for the renewal of the Slave Trade, were communicated to the two Houses of Parliament.

The author has occasionally left hints of this kind in these discourses, in order to shew, how any passing events may be improved in sermons preached on *particular occasions*.

against our salvation by the free unmerited grace of God in Christ Jesus. But the Scriptures are full of declarations respecting the rewards that shall be bestowed on those who abound in good works; and to keep them out of sight is greatly to dishonour God, who best knows what he himself will do, and how most effectually to encourage in his people every thing that is good. We say then, in conformity with our text, that *God will recompense these acts of justice and mercy with the richest communications of his grace and peace.*

[The best of men may have seasons of darkness and distress, even as others: they may also be calumniated and traduced by evil men, and be harassed also by cruel persecutions: but, if they abound in the heavenly dispositions before specified, "their light shall rise in obscurity, and break forth as the morning, and their darkness be as the noon-day; yea, their health also shall spring forth speedily," and they shall experience in their own souls far richer consolations than they ever did, or can, administer to their afflicted brethren. "Their righteousness," which has been impeached, "shall go before them," to testify of their real character; and "the glory of the Lord shall be their rear-ward," interposing between them and their persecutors, like the cloud and pillar of fire, for their effectual preservation and protection. Whatever they want, they shall have liberty of access to God for it; and, upon their crying to him, he will present himself before them, saying, "Here I am," and, whatever thou wantest, "I will give thee." Are they in doubt how to act? "the Lord will guide them continually." Are they in any particular necessity or distress? God "will satisfy their souls in drought, and even make fat their bones:" insomuch that *their graces shall flourish* "like a well-watered garden," and *their consolations shall abound,* "like a spring of water whose waters fail not[c]"— — —]

LEARN then from hence,

1. How the approaching *Fast-day*[d] should be kept—

[The outward tokens of humiliation should not be neglected; but the inward rectification of the soul should be principally aimed at: we should "break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor[e]." To "do justly, and to love mercy, are the chief things which our God requireth of us[f]." If then we would spend an acceptable

[c] In treating this subject, all these rich promises should be more distinctly and fully considered.

[d] Or, *Thanksgiving-day.* [e] Dan. iv. 27. [f] Mic. vi. 8.

acceptable day to the Lord, let us set earnestly to work, to rectify whatever we know to have been amiss, and to fulfil to the uttermost every office of compassion and love. Let us search out occasions of doing good, and, each according to his ability, exert himself in promoting the edification and happiness of all around him———]

2. How to obtain a very heaven upon earth—

[Many religious professors enjoy but little comfort in the Divine life: and though they themselves are ready to ascribe their want of comfort to a deep sense of their own unworthiness, we apprehend that the true reason of it will most generally be found to be, an habitual neglect of the acts and offices of love: they are either covetous and worldly-minded, or at least destitute of those holy affections which should be constantly in exercise for the relief of our fellow-creatures, and for the glory of our God. We know full well that peace must primarily spring from views of Christ and his salvation; but we know also that a holy activity in the service of our God, and an enlarged exercise of love to man for his sake, are the appointed means of obtaining from God the manifestations of his love, and the consolations of his Spirit. "To water others, is the way to be ourselves watered;" and to mete out liberally to others, is the way to have good measure poured into our own bosom. Let us then abound more and more in every good work; and then we shall find that "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."]

DXXXI.

OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH ENJOINED.

Isai. lviii. 13, 14. *If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath A delight, The holy of the Lord, Honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

THAT the observance of the sabbath was intended to be of universal and perpetual obligation, does not admit of any reasonable doubt. It was enjoined to man in Paradise: and the commandment relating to it, when renewed to man at Mount Sinai, was, like all

all the other moral commandments, written by God himself on tables of stone. The Jewish Prophets spake of it as to be continued under the Gospel dispensation[a]: and the Apostles evidently continued the observance of it, transferring it only from the last day of the week to the first, in commemoration of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and of the work of redemption which was thereby completed[b]. The ceremonial laws relating to it are abrogated; but the moral part of it is as much in force as ever.

In the passage before us we may see,

I. In what light we should view the sabbath—

The estimation in which it should be held is here variously expressed: we are taught to account that day,

1. Holy—

[Whatever was consecrated to God under the Law was accounted holy: it was separated from all profane or common use, and was employed solely for the ends and purposes for which it had been thus set apart. Thus the sabbath, being consecrated to the especial service of God, is called in our text "God's holy day;" and, "The holy of the Lord." In the New Testament also it is called, "The Lord's day[c]." Hence it is obvious, that every part of it is to be regarded as the Lord's property, and to be improved for him alone. We should feel a veneration for it, precisely as we should for any thing else that had been dedicated to the Lord: and, as we shudder at the impiety of Belshazzar in using, at a feast, the sacred vessels which he had taken from Jerusalem, though he himself was not a worshipper of Jehovah; much more must we, who acknowledge the sanctity of the sabbath, shudder at the thought of alienating any portion of it from Him, to whom it exclusively belongs.]

2. Honourable—

[If any man, under the Law, had regarded the Temple, the sacrifices, and the vessels of the sanctuary, in no other light than as a common house, or common utensils, or common food, he would have been considered as greatly dishonouring God. Thus the very sanctity of the sabbath should render it "honourable"

[a] See Ch. lvi. 1, 4, 6.

[b] See John xx. 19, 26. Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. [c] Rev. i. 10.

"honourable" in our estimation; and we should labour to "honour it" by every possible expression of our regard.]

3. Delightful—

[The arrival of that day should be greeted by us with holy joy: we should say, "This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." If we could suppose an angel sent down to this lower world to labour in some common occupation, and permitted every seventh day to return to his heavenly abodes, and spend that day in the employments suited to his taste, with what delight would he look forward to the stated returns of that day! So should it be with us; and so it *will* be, in proportion as we have attained to the views and dispositions of those blessed spirits. Not that we should delight in it merely as a day of rest to the body, but as a day wherein God calls us, like Moses, to come up and commune with him on his Holy Mount: and, instead of abridging it, or complaining of it as long and wearisome, we should rather say, with Peter, "It is good for us to be here;" and should almost regret the arrival of the period when we must descend from the Mount, to the less-pleasing occupations of time and sense.]

But we will proceed to state more particularly,

II. In what manner we should employ it—

In what manner we should *not* employ it, is here distinctly told us—

[Worldly business, and carnal pleasure, and unprofitable conversation, are all expressly proscribed: "we must not do our own ways, nor find our own pleasure, nor speak our own words." On all the other days of the week we may find time for these things; but on the sabbath-day they are to be excluded altogether. It is a grievous mistake to imagine, that after the public services of the day we are at liberty to engage in vain pursuits, invented only to beguile the time, which otherwise would be a burthen upon our hands: there are pursuits proper to the day; and in them exclusively should our time be occupied. We do not mean to say, that such things as can neither be anticipated nor postponed may not be done with innocence: for even under the Law, a latitude was allowed in relation to "what every man must eat[d]." In reference to such things as are really necessary, we are authorized to say, that "God will have mercy, and not sacrifice:" but it becomes all to be on their guard, that they do not deceive their own souls; for God can easily distinguish the hidden motives of the heart; and will surely judge our actions as

[d] Exod. xii. 16.

as good or evil, according as their quality shall be found in his eyes. If the infringement of the sabbath be reluctant, as in the extinguishing of a fire, or in the exercise of compassion to man or beast, it is well; but if we be actuated by considerations of ease, or interest, or pleasure, to alienate from God any of that time which ought to be consecrated to his service, we may be assured that we must answer for it in the day of judgment.]

Our one aim on that day must be, to "honour God"—

[The services which we are to render to our God on that day are various, and all compatible with each other. The first undoubtedly are *private:* we should give ourselves in a more peculiar manner to reading, to meditation, to prayer. On every day we should search the Scriptures, but more especially on that day; applying them to our own hearts, examining ourselves by them, and intreating God to make them effectual for the conversion and salvation of our souls. From our closets we should go to worship God in *public*, and to testify before all our regard for his authority, and our delight in his service. Whilst engaged in the various offices of prayer, or hearing of the word, or of communicating at the table of the Lord, we should be particularly careful that the frame of our minds be suited to the employment in which we are engaged; lest, whilst we profess to be serving God, we be found only mocking and insulting him by hypocritical professions. In the intervals, when we are disengaged from private or public duties, we may relieve our minds, and improve our time, in such as are of a social nature. The visiting of the sick, the comforting of the afflicted, the instructing of the rising generation, and, above all, the endeavouring to teach our children and servants, and to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," are services well pleasing to God, and admirably suited to the sanctity of that holy day. It is much to be feared that this latter duty in particular is sadly neglected, even in religious families; and that the great predilection that has been manifested by the religious world for public services, has brought into disuse those more self-denying offices which formerly occupied a considerable portion of the sabbath-day. But, in whichever of these duties we are occupied, our great aim must be, to "honour God;" demeaning ourselves as in his more immediate presence, and endeavouring to approve ourselves to him as faithful servants.]

And shall the sabbath, in this view of it, be accounted a day of gloom? No; we shall have far other sentiments of it, if we consider,

III. The

III. The benefits we may expect from a due observance of it—

Whatever reference there may be in our text to the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, we cannot doubt but the promises here made have a higher and more spiritual import. In them we are assured, that, if we really keep the sabbath as we ought, we shall be blessed with,

1. Delight in God—

[There is not any thing which God more delights to honour than a due observance of the sabbath. We may perform the outward duties of that day, and reap no material benefit: but if we truly and earnestly endeavour to honour God in the way before described, God will draw nigh to us, and reveal himself to us, and fill us with joy and peace in believing. And here we confidently make our appeal to all who have ever laboured to spend a sabbath to the Lord, whether they have not found such a measure of grace and peace flowing into their souls, as has abundantly recompensed their utmost exertions? Who must not acknowledge that one day thus spent in the courts and in the service of Jehovah, is better than a thousand passed amongst the vain delights of this world[e]? And where the sabbath is thus habitually honoured, we will venture to say, that such happiness will at times flow into the soul, as David experienced, when he said, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst my mouth praiseth thee with "joyful lips[f]:" yes, "they shall be satisfied with the fatness of God's house; and he will make them drink of the river of his pleasures[g]."]

2. Victory over our spiritual enemies—

[This seems to be the import of that expression, "I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth[h];" and it shall be fulfilled to all who conscientiously improve their sabbaths to the glory of their God. Too many of those who profess religion, are, it must be confessed, scarcely, if at all, advancing in the Divine life: their evil dispositions still retain such an ascendant over them, as to make them go on heavily all their days. But, if we were to inquire how they spent their sabbaths, and what efforts they made to glorify God in their public, private, and social duties, we should soon find the reason of their slow progress. As our Lord said of some particular evil spirits, "These go not out, but by prayer and fasting," so we may say of the evils which are predominant in

[e] Ps. lxxxiv. 4, 10. [f] Ps. lxiii. 5. [g] Ps. xxxvi. 8.
[h] Compare Deut. xxxii. 13. & xxxiii. 29.

in many professors of religion, They do not give way, because such slight efforts are made upon the sabbath to subdue them. If that day were truly and entirely devoted to the Lord, Satan would no longer retain the ungodly as his vassals, nor be able to exert so much influence over those who have professedly cast off his yoke.]

3. The full possession of the heavenly Canaan—

[That land which was given to Jacob for his inheritance, was typical of the Canaan that is above, which truly "floweth with milk and honey." And it may be safely affirmed, that no person who conscientiously employed his sabbaths here, ever did, or ever can, fall short of the heavenly rest. Thousands who have perished by the hand of the public executioner, have traced their shame and misery to a neglect of the sabbath: but never was an instance known of one who duly improved his sabbaths being left to die under the dominion of his sins. Indeed the services of the sabbath cannot possibly consist with indulged and wilful sin: on the contrary, they are both a preparation for heaven, and a foretaste of it: on earth the saints behold their God by faith, but in heaven they will behold him face to face: on earth they, as it were, learn and rehearse their parts: and in heaven they will join the full chorus of saints and angels in everlasting hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb.]

SEE hence,

1. How reasonable are the requirements of God in his Gospel!

[Had God required six days out of the seven to be spent in such exercises, it would have been highly reasonable that we should obey him: how much more when he gives us six for earthly business, and requires only one to be consecrated entirely unto him! If the services of that day were ever so painful, they might well be claimed by Him who has done such great things for us: and how much more when they are so delightful and so profitable! Grudge him not then that day, nor any portion of it; but let it be wholly and unreservedly devoted to his service.]

2. How just will be the condemnation of those who disobey them!

[A person who has attained to fifty years of age, has had *above seven years of sabbaths.* O what blessings might not have been secured in that time, if all those sabbaths had been sanctified to the Lord! and what judgments does not he merit, who has wasted all of them in a wilful neglect of God! Little as we think of sabbaths now, we shall find ere long,

long, that the profaning of them has greatly increased our guilt and misery. The Lord grant that this day may not pass away as so many others have done, unprofitably to our souls; but let it be to every one of us a preparation for our eternal rest!]

DXXXII.

THE RIGHTEOUS A PREY TO THE WICKED.

Isai. lix. 15. *He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey.*

IT may sometimes appear unreasonable to take portions of Scripture which describe the state and character of the Jews in former days, and to apply them to ourselves at this day. But it must be remembered, that human nature is the same in all ages; and under the same circumstances will betray the same infirmities.

This will account for St. Paul's mode of proving the total depravity of our nature, and the consequent impossibility of our being ever justified by the works of the law. He cites from different parts of Scripture a great variety of passages, which describe the state of the wicked Jews at different periods of their history: and those passages he adduces, to shew how fallen our nature is. Some of the most humiliating parts of his description are taken from this very chapter, which confessedly portrays the character of the most abandoned Jews at a period of extreme degeneracy[a]. An objector might say, This is not equitable: and I do not admit that the worst of the Jews in their most degenerate days are any just criterion for judging of human nature generally. But the Apostle might reply, that, if any persons so highly favoured as the Jews could attain to such heights of impiety as they assuredly did, the fault must be, not in the circumstances in which they were placed, but in human nature itself; which would betray the same dispositions in others, if they were subjected to the same trials. Hence, without hesitation, I take the words of our text as containing a general truth,

[a] Compare ver. 7, 8. with Rom. iii. 15—18.

truth, and as asserting a fact which will be found to exist in all ages and countries of the world: "He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey."

It is my intention,

I. To establish this fact—

This will be found true in all former ages—

[Go back to the days of Cain and Abel; and there you will find, that the very first man who was born of our fallen parents murdered his own brother, for no other reason than this, "because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous[b]." Proceed downward through all successive periods of the world, and behold Noah derided for his belief in God's word; Lot menaced for refusing to concur in the most horrible abominations that human nature could commit; Elijah deemed the troubler of Israel, because he withstood idolatry; and all the Prophets in succession reviled and persecuted by the people amongst whom they dwelt: as our Lord says, "Which of the Prophets did not your fathers persecute?" Every one of them might adopt the language of David, and say, "They that render evil for good are against me, because I follow the thing that good is[c]."

If under any circumstances an holy person could escape persecution, we might well suppose that our blessed Lord would have escaped it; both because his whole life was employed in doing good to the bodies, as well as the souls, of men; and because his wisdom infinitely exceeded that of any other of mankind, seeing that "he spake on all occasions as never man spake." But so far was he from being an exception to the general rule, that he was an object of more inveterate hatred in proportion to the transcendent excellence of his character. There never existed upon earth one so spotless as he, nor one who was an object of such universal hatred and abhorrence[d]. His Apostles after him were all treated with the same kind of indignities, wherever they went; their converts also in every country experiencing the same lot; even as many of our own countrymen did at the time of the Reformation. There has in all places existed the same "enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman[e]," and the same opposition betwixt "light and darkness, Christ and Belial[f]."]

Nor is it less true at the present hour--

[The person "who departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" to all around him, and becomes, as it were, a *legitimate* object for every one to pursue with whatever degree of malignity

[b] 1 John iii. 12. [c] Ps. xxxviii. 20. [d] Isai. xlix. 7.
[e] Gen. iii. 15. [f] 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

malignity he may see fit. There is no other member of society, of a decent character, that is so universally hated and contemned. Every other person, if he do amiss, has some one to extenuate his fault: and, if he be treated, either in word or deed, with an undue measure of severity, he will have some to resent the injury, and to vindicate his cause. But let a godly man be reviled, let his very motives have sentence passed upon them, let him be stigmatized with the most opprobrious names, and who will take his part? Who will vindicate his character? who will shew resentment on his account? If even a word of palliation be spoken in his behalf, it will be almost a miracle: but a real friend, who feels for him, who enters into his cause, who espouses his interests, he will not find in the whole world, unless it be one who is under the same condemnation with himself. As it is said of our blessed Lord, "His manner of life who would declare[g]?" so may it be said of all his followers: their accusers are bold enough: but their defenders are not to be found, even in the seasons of their greatest need.

Nor is it to one description of persons only that the godly are obnoxious: the rich and the poor, the moral and the immoral, are penetrated with the same feelings towards them, and manifest their hatred in the same unblushing manner. Were Paul and Barnabas to be expelled from Antioch? no more willing instruments could be found than some "devout and honourable women[h]." Have Paul and Silas provoked the envy of the Jews at Thessalonica? there are plenty of "lewd fellows of the baser sort" ready to execute whatever their superiors may wish, and to drive these holy men from the place; uproar and tumult being deemed the best answers to arguments which could not be controverted by rational discourse[i]. Only let Pilate and the chief priests pass sentence against Christ, and there will be no want of common people to spit in his face, and crucify him. David, though so great and good a man, complains that all orders of men were actuated by the same malignant dispositions towards him: "the fat bulls of Basan beset him, whilst dogs also compassed him round about[k];" yea, "the very abjects gathered themselves together against him, and hypocritical mockers gnashed upon him with their teeth[l]." That there are times and seasons of comparative peace to the Church we readily acknowledge: there were such seasons even in the primitive Church[m]. And we also thankfully acknowledge, that even where the same disapprobation of vital godliness exists, it does not manifest itself with the same degree of bitterness in all persons; the natural enmity of the heart being moderated

[g] Isai. liii. 8.
[h] Acts xvii. 3, 5.
[i] Acts xiii. 50.
[k] Ps. xxii. 12, 13, 16.
[l] Ps. xxxv. 15, 16.
[m] Acts ix. 31.

rated by sentiments of liberality and candour. But we will still say, that it does exist in the heart of every unconverted man, and that "they who are born after the flesh, will, though not in all cases with the same rancour, persecute those who are born after the Spirit:" as it was formerly, "so it is now";" and so it ever will be, as long as an unconverted man shall exist upon the face of the earth.]

Having established this fact, I now come,

II. To account for it—

Certainly one should rather have expected, that every one departing from evil, would be an object, not of hatred and censure, but of approbation and applause. We are constrained however to acknowledge, that this is not the case; but that, on the contrary, the person who takes this step will infallibly "make himself a prey." And whence arises this? It is chiefly owing to these two things, namely, that, in departing from evil,

1. He irritates and incenses Satan—

[Satan is "the strong man armed, who delighteth to keep his goods in peace[o]." As being "the god of this world[p]," he would have all his votaries obedient. But when one of his subjects revolts from him, and casts off his yoke, he instantly exerts himself to bring him back to his former state of vassalage and sin. For this end he puts in motion all his forces, both of men and devils, unnumbered myriads of whom he has at his command. Every species of device he uses, to accomplish his malignant ends. If he judges persuasion to be the most likely means of attaining his object, he will find some friend or relative to whisper in our ear, "Friend, spare thyself." This, though in an Apostle, was the devil's work[q]; for, as he can transform himself into an angel of light, so can he make his ministers assume the garb of piety, and appear like Ministers of righteousness[r]. On the other hand, does he judge that open violence will be more conducive to his end? he will soon find a Judas to betray us, a Pilate to condemn us, a populace to crucify us. That in the instance of our blessed Lord was all accomplished by him; for it was "his hour, and the power of darkness[s]." And, as then, so still "he worketh in all the children of disobedience," and employs them in every possible way to maintain and extend his empire in the world[t].

This

[n] Gal. iv. 29. [o] Luke xi. 21. [p] 2 Cor. iv. 4.
[q] Matt. xvi. 22, 23. [r] 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.
[s] John xiii. 27. Luke xxii. 53. [t] Eph. ii. 2.

This then, in part, accounts for the fact which we have before stated. If there be a deserter from a camp, no effort is left unattempted to bring him back to the standard which he has left: and much more may we expect that one so jealous of his power as Satan is, will exert himself to the uttermost, both by fraud and violence, to reduce to bondage those who have escaped from his dominion.]

2. He reproves and condemns the world—

[It is said of Noah, that, in building an ark for the saving of his house, "he condemned the world[u]:" and in like manner all who depart from evil condemn those who continue in the way which they forsake. The very act of forsaking them is a practical condemnation of them. But *this* the world will not endure: for they feel themselves reduced to the alternative, of either condemning us, or acknowledging the folly of their own ways. This latter they do not choose to do: and therefore, in self-defence, as it were, they adopt the former, and load us with obloquy on account of our needless, or hypocritical, preciseness. They will pretend indeed to cast the blame on our *principles:* but it is with the *practice* that they in reality are offended. If we would but conform to *their* habits, we might hold whatever principles we pleased, and no man would find fault with us: but if we venture to turn out of the broad road, and to walk in the narrow path which the Scriptures have marked out, we shall be sure enough to be comprehended under some sweeping term of reproach, which, whilst it purports to attack our principles, involves in indiscriminate censure all, however opposite their principles, provided only they agree in their practice. That this is the true ground of their enmity, appears from what our blessed Lord has said respecting the treatment shewn to him: "The world," says he to his Disciples, whose light was obscured by their proximity to him, "the world cannot hate you: but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil[x]." So in whatever place we bear our testimony, the people who hate the light will wish to get rid of us, and will, in heart, if not in express terms, say to us as Amaziah did to Amos, "O thou seer, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but prophesy not again any more at Bethel," to molest and trouble us[y].]

That this subject may be brought more home to our own bosoms, permit me to ADDRESS,

1. Those who through the fear of man are induced to continue in evil—

[It is certain that many, where the Gospel is preached with

[u] Heb. xi. 7 [x] John vii. 7. [y] Am. vii. 12, 13.

with fidelity, are led into clearer views of their duty, than they can prevail upon themselves to carry into effect: they are kept back by "the fear of man, which bringeth a snare." But let me ask, What is there that man can do, in comparison of what God *will* do, if we violate our conscience, and prove "rebellious against the light" which he has given us[z]? Hear the kind and tender admonition of our Lord: "I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but fear Him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear Him[a]." Think with yourselves, not only what a folly it is to fear man rather than God, but what base ingratitude it is to the Saviour, who came down from heaven for you, and died upon the cross for you, and bore all the curses of God's broken law for you. Did he then, for the joy that was set before him of saving your souls, endure the cross and despise the shame; and will you bear no cross, and encounter no shame for him? Should you not rather rejoice if you are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake? Blush then for your ingratitude, and take up your cross, and glory in it, and "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach[b]."]

2. Those who are called to suffer for righteousness' sake—

[Shall I lament for you? No indeed; but rather congratulate you on the honour conferred upon you. How remarkable is that declaration of the Apostle to the Philippian Church! "To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake[c]." Here he represents your sufferings as a gift from God; a gift of a most valuable kind bestowed upon you purely for Christ's sake; a gift greater far than faith itself: for if by faith you are saved, by sufferings you have your weight of glory augmented to an indefinite extent. Search the Scriptures throughout, and you will find but one testimony on this head: you are invariably taught to regard your sufferings, whatever they may be, as a ground of joy[d]: you are told to "rejoice and leap for joy, seeing that your reward in heaven will be proportionably great[e]." See then that ye faint not, either at the continuance or increase of your trials: but "be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life." Let your great concern be, to "depart more and more from what is evil, and to abound more and more in that which is good: so shall you enjoy the testimony of a good conscience here, and receive the plaudit of your Judge in the realms of bliss.]

[z] Job xxiv. 13. [a] Luke xii. 4, 5. [b] Heb. xiii. 13.
[c] Phil. i. 29. [d] Jam. i. 2, & v. 11.
[e] Matt. v. 12. & 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

DXXXIII.

THE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL VICTORY.

Isai. lix. 19. *When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.*

THAT there will be a time when all the nations of the earth shall be converted unto God, is attested by every part of Holy Writ. But the seasons of great awakenings in the Church have always been seasons of violent opposition from the great adversary of God and man: and while there remain any ungodly persons to act as his instruments, he will not fail to make use of them, in obstructing to the uttermost the progress of true religion. It is matter of consolation however, that the more strenuous his exertions are, the more will God himself put forth his power to maintain and advance his work; and we are well assured, that, "when he worketh, none shall hinder." That the passage before us refers to the Millennial period, is certain; because St. Paul cites it in that very view[a]. The words of the text indeed are somewhat differently translated by some, who apply the whole of it to God exerting himself "like a river straitened in its course, which a strong wind driveth along[b]." But in our translation there is a very important idea suggested, from which there is no need to depart. It leads us to consider,

I. In what way the great adversary of souls assaults the Church—

Never for one moment does Satan relax his vigilance, or feel any intermission of his enmity against the people of God. But there are particular seasons when his efforts are more violent, and when he may be said to "come in like a flood." In the manner of his assaults indeed he is continually changing; but his object is invariably the same. He seeks to overwhelm the Church,

1. By errors—

[In this way he has often prevailed to an astonishing extent. Even in the Apostolic age he had many active emissaries,

[a] Compare ver. 20. with Rom. xi. 26. [b] Bishop Lowth.

emissaries, whom he sent forth to disseminate error, and by whom he "subverted whole houses[c]." It is scarcely credible to what a degree he "blinded the minds" of men in later ages, by the superstitions of Popery; and with what rapidity he established the heresies of Pelagius, Arius, and Socinus. But we need not go back to former times: for we have witnessed in our own days the spread of infidelity like a deluge: we have seen a whole country, under the idea of superior illumination, setting up a false philosophy in the place of true religion, and establishing the worship of Reason on the ruins of Christianity.

If we of this nation have been preserved in a measure from the general contagion, still the errors that obtain amongst us are as general and fatal as any that were ever propagated in the world. The fundamentals of Christianity are kept out of sight: the doctrines of original sin, of salvation by faith, and of the operations of the Holy Spirit, are either wholly exploded, or received only in such a way as to reduce them to barren sentiments, devoid of efficacy on the soul——Nor are the professors of godliness freed from the baneful influence of error. There are not wanting some who turn the grace of God into licentiousness, and boast that they are freed from the law, not as a covenant only, but as a rule of life. This is but too pleasing to corrupt nature: no wonder therefore that such teachers draw away disciples after them, and that they cause many to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.]

2. By iniquity—

[At all times there will be found much impiety and profaneness in the world. But when a Governor, or a professor of religion, lends himself to the propagation of wickedness, it will, like an impetuous torrent, bear down all before it, and inundate the land. Jeroboam no sooner enjoined the dereliction of God and his worship, and set up calves in Dan and Bethel, than all the ten tribes "willingly ran after his commandment[d]:" and Peter no sooner sanctioned a cowardly shunning of the cross, than all the Church, not excepting Barnabas himself, were drawn away by his dissimulation[e]. Indeed this is the natural effect of sin: wherever "iniquity abounds, the love of many will wax cold." The difficulty of maintaining one's stedfastness must of necessity be much increased by a general prevalence of sin. How hard must Noah have found it to preserve himself unspotted in the midst of the antediluvian world; and Lot in Sodom; and Micaiah or Elijah in Israel[f]! We are, alas! far more ready to follow a multitude in doing evil, than to put them to shame by a holy conversation;

[c] Tit. i. 11. [d] Hos. v. 11. [e] Gal. ii. 12, 13.
[f] 1 Kin. xix. 10. & xxii. 6, 13.

conversation; more ready to "put our light under a bushel," than to expose it to the blasts which threaten to extinguish it. Well has our Lord said, "Woe unto the world because of offences."]

3. By persecution—

[This was the engine which Satan used from the beginning: he instigated the first-born of man to murder his own brother, for no other crime than his superior sanctity[g]. What efforts were made in succeeding ages by Pharaoh to destroy the people of the Lord, is well known. The Prophets, the Apostles, and our Lord himself, were almost without exception persecuted unto death. The Christian Church, from the first moment of its establishment to this present hour, has experienced the truth of that assertion, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution[gg]." And how many have been cast down by it! How many "bright stars have been swept away by the dragon's tail[h]!" St. Paul, when arraigned before Nero as a criminal, was left alone: all his followers forsook him; and he was left without any other countenance or support than what he received from the Lord himself[i]. Thus in every age, "those who have not had root in themselves, have endured but for a while, and in the time of persecution have fallen away[k]."]

4. Temptation—

[Many who have withstood all other assaults, have fallen at last through the fiery darts of temptation. If we find here and there a Joseph or a Daniel who is enabled to defeat his enemy, we see multitudes who, like David or Peter, are as beacons to us, and as monuments of human weakness. By the means that have been before mentioned, Satan assaults the Church at large: by temptations he attacks the individuals in particular. And who has passed this ordeal unhurt? who has combated without a wound? Happy for us, if we have not been utterly cast down, and left to rise no more!]

But that we may not be discouraged, let us consider,

II. In what way the Spirit of God withstands him—

"Our help is indeed laid upon One that is mighty." The Lord of Hosts himself stands forth for our help: he erects his standard; and calls us to fight under it. He effectually defeats the attempts of our great adversary,

1. By

[g] 1 John iii. 12. [gg] See ver. 15. middle clause.
[h] Rev. xii. 4. [i] 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17. [k] Matt. xiii. 21.

1. By the preaching of his Gospel—

[With this apparently weak and inefficient weapon does he go forth to smite down his enemies, and subdue them to the obedience of faith. It is justly called "the rod of his strength." See what God wrought in one single hour by this sword in the hand of a poor fisherman: he reached the inmost souls of three thousand rebels, and rescued them out of the hands of his inveterate foe. Wherever the doctrine of the cross was exhibited, it proved "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds" of sin and Satan: and at this moment, though delivered in much weakness, it is "the power of God to the salvation of many souls"———]

2. By the dealings of his providence—

[The dispensations of Providence, whether pleasing or afflictive, are all ordered for this end. His "goodness is intended to lead us to repentance;" and the day of adversity to bring us to consideration. Astonishing were his interpositions in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, for the purpose of preserving his Church and people. And if we were more observant of the various occurrences of life, we should often see that his hand hath wrought gloriously on our behalf. As David, when almost surrounded by Saul's army, was rescued by the diversion caused by the invading army of the Philistines[l], so have we experienced, on many occasions, God's seasonable interposition for "the deliverance of our souls[ll]." "Whoso is wise, will observe these things; and he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord[m]."]

3. By the influence of his grace—

[All other means, if unaccompanied with a Divine agency on the soul, are of no effect: the richest mercies or the heaviest judgments serve only to harden the heart, and sear the conscience. The Gospel itself is rather "a savour of death unto death, than of life unto life," if it "come not to us in power and in the Holy Ghost." But the most trivial event shall impress the mind, and the most cursory observation pierce like a barbed arrow, when directed by God "through the joints of the harness:" it is then "sharper than any two-edged sword, and pierces to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow"———]

This subject naturally suggests to us the IMPROVEMENT suited to it. Hear then a word,

1. Of warning—

[We may not have experienced, or strongly noticed, the assaults of Satan: but let us not therefore imagine that he is regardless

[l] 1 Sam. xxiii. 26—28. [ll] See Zech. i. 18—21. & Rev. xii. 15, 16.
[m] Ps. cvii. 43.

regardless of us: he is only watching his opportunity to strike with more effect. When he was defeated by our Lord, he retired; but it was only "for a season." In the garden of Gethsemane he redoubled his malignant efforts: and sooner or later he will make his assaults on us, however eminent we may be, or however careful to give him no advantage against us. Let us then "watch and be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation." Let us "resist the devil; and he shall flee from us."]

2. Of direction—

[In the warfare which you are called to maintain with this great adversary, think not to resist him in your own strength. Your strength is perfect weakness. Unsupported by your God, you will be crushed before the moth. You have not in yourselves a sufficiency for the smallest thing; much less to vanquish this "roaring lion." Lean not then either to your own understanding, or to an arm of flesh: but let your trust be in God, who made heaven and earth.]

3. Of encouragement—

[However numerous or potent your enemies may be, "there are more for you, than against you[n]:" "God has given you a banner[o];" yea, he himself is your banner[p]. Under him you shall conquer; yea, you shall be "more than conquerors through Him that loved you." Your extremity shall be the very season of his effectual interposition: "In the mount the Lord shall be seen." "Fear not then; for though thou art only a worm, thou shalt thresh the mountains." Even now may you triumph, in full assurance of victory. You may challenge all your enemies, and, like David, already pronounce Goliath's doom[q]. "Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and you shall soon put your feet upon the necks of your vanquished enemies.]

[n] See Ps. xciii. 3, 4. [o] Ps. lx. 4. [p] Exod. xvii. 15.
[q] See Ps. cxviii. 6—12.

DXXXIV.

MILLENNIAL PIETY DESCRIBED.

Isai. lx. 8. *Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?*

THERE is much spoken in the holy Scriptures respecting the glory of the latter day. This whole chapter is occupied with the subject. The predictions contained in it have never yet been verified. Great

Great as was the spread of the Gospel in the Apostolic age, it was nothing in comparison of that to which we are taught to look forward at a period that is now fast approaching. The prophet, whilst occupied in the contemplation of that day, saw it, as it were, already commenced, and the whole Gentile world flocking to Christ, even as doves to their windows. The language in which he depicts that day is suited to the time at which he wrote. Jerusalem was then the centre of union to all the tribes. Thither all the males went up thrice a year: there the sacrifices were offered: and thither all Gentile proselytes also came to present their offerings to the Lord. But all these things were typical of the Christian Church, which shall be established on the face of the whole earth, and of the spiritual sacrifices which all who come up to our Zion shall offer there.

I propose to consider our text,

I. In reference to the millennial period—

The question is evidently the language of surprise and joy: and the answer to it is given in the whole context. Let us attend to,

1. The prophet's own description of that day

[Then shall light burst forth, almost as at the first creation, when "God said, Let there be light; and there was light." The gross darkness which at present covers the whole earth will be dispelled by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, and "all flesh will see the salvation of God[a]." "The Gentiles, from one end of the earth even to the other, will then come to Zion's light, and kings to the brightness of her rising:" and with them they will bring whatsoever they have whereby they may glorify their God; the whole land, as it were, being covered with their retinue. "The multitude of camels shall cover thee," says the Lord, "the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah: all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord[b]." The very cattle shall feel, as it were, impressed with a holy zeal to honour God, and come up voluntarily, ambitious of the honour of being offered in sacrifice upon his altar: "All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar; and I will

[a] Luke iii. 6. [b] ver. 2—6.

I will glorify the House of my glory[c]." All this Jehovah revealed to the prophet, and made to pass, as it were, before his eyes; assuring him, that the Isles of Western Europe should take the lead in this glorious work: "Surely *the isles* shall wait for me, and *the ships of Tarshish first*, (O that *our* happy Isle might have this distinguished honour, and employ her shipping in this glorious cause!) to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee[d]."

And in what manner shall this event take place? Shall it resemble any thing that has ever yet existed in the world? No: it will infinitely surpass any thing that occurred even in the Apostolic age. Then indeed there was one day, the day of Pentecost, when God's power was revealed, and three thousand were converted to the faith of Christ: but at the period to which we are looking forward, "a *nation* will be born in a day[e]." A Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit will be a daily occurrence; and not in one place only, but in every part of the globe: so that the converts will come "flying" in inconceivable numbers, "like a cloud," and with the ardour and celerity of "doves flying to their windows."

Certainly this description of the Millennium is highly figurative: yet we conceive it to be fully justified by,]

2. The testimony of other Prophets respecting it—

[All the Prophets, with more or less clearness, testify of this day. David speaks very fully and strongly respecting it. He tells us, that "the utmost ends of the earth are given to Christ for his possession[f];" that "all kings shall fall down before him, and "all nations shall serve him[g];" and that "the whole earth shall be filled with his glory[h]." The prophet Daniel repeatedly declares, that "the stone which has been cut out without hands shall break in pieces all the kingdoms of the earth, and become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth," and "stand for ever[i];" and that "all people, nations, and languages, shall serve" our adorable Redeemer; and that "his dominion should never pass away[k]." Habakkuk assures us, that "the knowledge of the Lord shall in that day cover the earth, as deeply and extensively as the waters cover the sea[l]." Zechariah also, who delights to dwell on this glorious subject, asserts, that "the Lord shall be King over all the earth; that in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one:" and that "from that time there shall be no more the Canaanite in the House of the Lord of Hosts[m]." Thus, without multiplying

[c] ver. 7. [d] ver. 9. [e] ver. 22. with lxvi. 8.
[f] Ps. ii. 8. [g] Ps. lxxii. 11. [h] ib. ver. 19.
[i] Dan. ii. 34,35,44. [k] Dan. vii. 14. [l] Hab. ii. 14.
[m] Zech. xiv. 9, 21.

multiplying passages to the same effect, we see, beyond a doubt, that a blessed season is approaching, when God will, as it were, "create all things new[n]," and there shall be "new heavens, and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness[o]."]

It will not be unprofitable to consider our text,

II. In reference to the present time—

But here we must notice it rather *with regret*—

[Though so many centuries have elapsed since the delivery of this prophecy, we are, though not in time, yet in appearance, almost as far as ever from its accomplishment. There is not one sixth of the human race that have ever so much as heard of the Lord Jesus Christ; and of those who are called by his name, the great mass are as far from any spiritual knowledge of him as the Heathen themselves. Look through Europe, or through our own highly-favoured kingdom, or even through our own immediate neighbourhood, and say, Whether you see, or hear of, any thing resembling the description in our text? Where do we find that ardent desire after God; that flocking of multitudes to Mount Zion; that surrender of themselves to God as living sacrifices; that determination to lose no time, but to press forward with increasing ardour, till they have found their rest in Christ? Here and there an individual may be found that is inquiring the way to Zion: but what appearance is there of a cloud, borne forward by the breath of the Almighty; or of a flock winging their way to Zion, with a zeal that regards no obstacle, and a rapidity that suffers no delay? I may rather ask, Where is the place in which the great mass of the inhabitants would not regard such zeal as an enthusiasm that was to be repressed, rather than as a piety deserving imitation? Instead therefore of saying, Who are *these?* we must rather say, "Where are there *any*, who fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" If *some* there be, still, in comparison of the bulk of nominal Christians, they are but as "the gleanings of the olive, two or three upon the topmost bough."]

Yet we may also in some degree notice it *with joy*—

[I bless God, there are *some*, and some also in this place, who do seek their rest in Christ, and do fly towards it with unabated ardour. Yes, and with surprise also, as well as joy, may I ask, "Who are these?" They were once as far off from God as the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, and as unlikely to devote themselves to God as the flocks of Kedar, or the rams of Nebaioth. Their education, their age, their associates, their habits, all rendered such a change highly improbable; and give us a decisive evidence, that He who has wrought

[n] Isai. lxv. 17. [o] 2 Pet. iii. 13.

wrought so effectually in them, can accomplish the same blessed change over the face of the whole earth. We therefore do rejoice, both for the individuals whose zeal is so kindled, and for those also who are provoked to emulation by the example that is set before them. And we pray God that their numbers may be increased a thousand-fold; and that in this place, as well as in the world at large, "a little one may become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. May the Lord hasten it in his time[p]!"]

APPLICATION—

To those who have begun their flight—

[Let me say, Suffer nothing to retard you, nothing to divert you from your purpose. If, instead of having a cloud, or a flock, to accompany you, you are but a solitary individual, let not that discourage you. Your object is not less praise-worthy on that account. Lot was not the less right in maintaining his love for piety, because all around him were confederate in evil courses; nor was Noah the less approved of God, because the whole world agreed in loading him with derision. If many will join you, be thankful for it: but, if there be not another in all the cities of the world that will flee with you to the mountain, go out of Sodom, and stop not in all the plain. The judgments which are coming on every unbelieving soul, will amply vindicate your honour, whilst your personal safety will abundantly repay your toil.

Yet go not alone, if you can by any means induce others to accompany you in your heavenly flight. Yea, be zealous and active in hastening forward the day that is spoken of in our text. Though the work itself is God's, yet it is to be accomplished by human means. If salvation be through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him alone, he must be made known to the benighted heathen: for "how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how can they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher[q]?"

I thank God that means are now using by different Societies to diffuse the Holy Scriptures throughout the world, and to send forth Missionaries to instruct both Jews and Gentiles. Aid these Societies then with all your power. It is particularly said in the verse following my text, that those who wait upon the Lord, "*bring their silver and their gold with them.*" Let not this be forgotten by you. Let your property be consecrated to this holy service: account this its best and most appropriate use: and, instead of giving grudgingly or of necessity to so good a work, regard it as your highest honour to contribute even in the smallest degree to the salvation of your

[p] ver. 22. [q] Rom. x. 14, 15.

your fellow-creatures, and to the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth.]

2. To those who have no such blessed object in view—

[What shall I say? I would take up a lamentation over them; and, in the language of surprise and grief, say, "Who are these who do *not* fly as a cloud, or as the doves to their windows?" What! have they never heard what a Saviour there is? or, are they ignorant how much they stand in need of mercy through him? Dear Brethren, be persuaded that there is no refuge for you but in Him: to him you *must* come, if you would ever find rest unto your souls. I beseech you, therefore, flee to him as your only hope: be in earnest: let not the doves flying to their windows outstrip you in your course. And bring to him all that you are, and all that you have. So shall the angels in the presence of God rejoice over you: so shall the Church of Christ also be edified through you: and so shall you be meet for the Church above, whither a whole cloud of witnesses are gone before you, and where you shall soon unite with them for ever in the service of your God.]

DXXXV.

EXCELLENCY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Isai. lx. 13. *The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee; the fir-tree, and the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary: and I will make the place of my feet glorious.*

WHILST we admire, as of necessity we must, the richness and diversity of the imagery which is employed to depict the beauty of the Christian Church, we must be careful to seize the truths which are so exhibited: for in this the sublime descriptions of the Prophets differ materially from the poetic flights of other authors; they declare what actually exists; whereas the poetical representations of uninspired men are for the most part either mere fictions, or truth rendered fictitious by the high colouring that is given to it. The description here given of the glory of the latter day is exceeding grand. The whole creation, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, contributes to it according to their several ability.

ability. Not men only, but even flocks and herds, are spoken of as coming voluntarily to consecrate themselves to the Lord; and in my text, the woods of Lebanon yield their produce, to adorn the Church, and to glorify their God.

The particular expressions in my text lead me to set before you,

I. The constitution of the Church of Christ—

From Lebanon the wood was brought for the erection of Solomon's Temple[a]: and all the glory of Lebanon shall be brought to our Zion also, to build an habitation for our incarnate God. By "the fir-tree and the pine" I understand the great and mighty of the earth; whilst "the box" represents the poor and humble, whether in respect of civil rank, or intellectual capacity. Both the one and the other of these shall be employed as constituent parts of God's spiritual temple. For each a suitable place shall be found, and for each an appropriate use.

The high and mighty shall be brought on a level with the lowest—

[Christianity does not at all interfere with distinctions in civil life: they are the appointment of God himself; and are necessary to the well-being of mankind. But in a spiritual view, the greatest monarch upon earth must be brought on a level with the meanest of his subjects. The axe must be laid to the root of all his pride and self-sufficiency, and he must be felled by the operation of the word and Spirit of God. Every man is a sinner before God: every man must be made to feel and acknowledge his guilt: every man must seek for mercy through the blood and righteousness of that Divine Saviour who died for him. Every man must live altogether in a state of dependence upon God, not merely as a God of providence, but especially as a God of grace; and must receive continually fresh supplies of grace and strength out of the fulness that is treasured up for him in Christ. This is not the work of the poor only, but of the rich also: the most learned philosopher must in this respect feel himself on a par with the most illiterate of the human race. All must equally be taught of God; and all "be saved equally by grace through faith in Christ."]

The poor, on the contrary, are raised to an equality with the highest—

[There

[a] 2 Chron. ii. 16.

[There is not a blessing which the poorest may not obtain, to the full extent that it can be enjoyed by the rich and great. The Apostles themselves were not selected from the higher or more intelligent classes, but from the lowest walks of life. A few poor fishermen were raised up to be the teachers of the whole world. And if it be thought that this was a peculiar case, and that the poor by reason of their disadvantages are greatly inferior to the rich, I must say, that, for the most part, the very reverse of this is true; and that God yet daily, in ten thousand instances, "reveals to babes the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent[b]." The very circumstance of the poor having so little in this world leads them more simply to depend on God; and their conscious want of human knowledge leads them to implore more humbly and more earnestly the teaching of God's Spirit: and hence by coming to God "hungry, they are filled with good things, whilst the rich are sent empty away[c]." Thus does God still "take the beggar from the dunghill, to set him among the princes[d]:" and it is still daily seen, that "the box" occupies a place in the Church of God which the loftiest cedar in Lebanon might envy.

That this is the constitution of the Church of Christ, is not left to be inferred from the figurative language of my text: it is expressly stated by St. James, who says, "Let the brother of *low* degree rejoice, in that he is *exalted;* but the *rich*, in that he is *made low*[e]." Here, I say, the whole of what I have asserted is stated plainly, and without a figure.]

I now proceed to notice,

II. The excellence of that constitution—

In our text, this particular constitution is set forth,

1. As ornamental to the Church itself—

[Let any one view the Church as so constituted. Let the loftiest "firs and pines" be viewed in union with the humble "box;" the kings and princes of the earth assembled at the footstool of the Divine Majesty in concert with the lowest classes of mankind: all there are bowing their knees together before their common Lord and Master: the same confessions, how humiliating soever they may be, proceed equally from the lips of all: the same petitions for grace, for mercy, for peace, for strength, are urged by all, with equal and united importunity: the same devout acknowledgments are poured forth by all for blessings received: the word delivered to them all is pronounced with the same authority,

[b] Matt. xi. 25. [c] Luke i. 53. [d] 1 Sam. ii. 8.
[e] Jam. i. 9, 10.

authority, and entire submission to it required from them all under the same awful sanctions: the same invitations and promises are held forth to all: and the same glorious inheritance assured to all who receive and obey the word. View them all as then sitting down together at the table of the Lord, as guests equally invited and equally accepted by the great Master of the feast; all eating of the same bread; all drinking of the same cup; and all receiving into their souls the same heavenly communications; and all returning to their homes refreshed and strengthened for their future labours. Say, Is not this lovely? Is it not a very emblem of heaven itself, where a poor Lazarus, whose very sores the dogs but lately licked, because he had not a friend to bind them up, now sits down with all the Prophets and Apostles of the Lord at the heavenly banquet, his head reclined in the very bosom of Abraham himself? Yes; thus it is in the Church below: "The rich and the poor meet together; and the Lord is the Maker of them all," the Father of them all, the portion of them all[f]. Amongst them all, there is no room either for contempt or envy; the honour and the happiness of all being wholly independent on worldly circumstances, and dependent only on the access to God which each obtains for himself, and the consequent manifestations of God's love which he is privileged to enjoy. Their degree of usefulness to the Church may indeed be affected by the situations which they severally occupy in civil life, and the qualifications with which they are endowed: but, as in the natural body, so in Christ's mystical body, though one member may have a higher office than another, none can dispense with the services of the rest: "the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor can the head say to the feet, I have no need of you." Every member has its proper place, and its proper office: and, if one were wanting, the whole body would be defective, and deformed. But in Christ's body not one member is wanting: every place is occupied; God having assigned to every member the situation adapted for it; and in the perfect adaptation of each to its proper ends, and the harmonious exercise of all for the general good, the beauty of the whole consists[g]. In truth, it is "for the beautifying of the place of God's sanctuary" that this assemblage of the high and low, "the pine and the box," is ordained: and we cannot but acknowledge, that in this view "Zion is beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth[h]."]

2. As honourable to God—

[To this point God himself calls our particular attention. "I will plant, says he, in the wilderness, the cedar, the shittah

[f] Prov. xxix. 13. [g] See 1 Cor. xii. 12—22. [h] Ps. xlviii. 1, 2.

shittah-tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together; that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it[l]." Now why, I would ask, does he lay such peculiar stress upon this, but because it reflects peculiar lustre on his character, and displays in a most endearing point of view his glorious perfections? Truly "this does make the place of his feet glorious;" because it shews, that, whilst he is "Lord of all, he is equally rich in mercy to all who call upon him[k]." In his regards, there is no difference between one and another: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ, that is, the image of Christ upon the soul, is all, and in all[l]."

Let us suppose for a moment that there were the same kind of partiality in him as he complains of in many of his professing people: "If there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and become judges who reason ill[m]?" I say, let us suppose such a partiality in God; and how unamiable would he appear! But "there is no such respect of persons with him[n]:" the humblest shrub in all the woods of Lebanon is as dear to him as the loftiest cedar there: yea, the weaker they are in themselves, the more tenderly he watches over them for good, that he may "display in them the excellency of his own power[o]," and "perfect his own strength in their weakness[p]." Even the least and meanest of them all he regards as "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord; and in them he is, and will be, glorified[q]."

In this then God acts altogether worthy of himself, and shews, that, as he is the Maker of all, so is he the Father, and the Friend of all.]

APPLICATION—

Such being the constitution of the Church,

1. Let us all seek to become members of it—

[Are there here any of the higher orders? I would say, give yourselves to the Lord, to serve him with your whole hearts. This is what you *must* do, if ever you would be happy; for

[l] Isai. xli. 19, 20. [k] Rom. x. 12. [l] Col. iii. 11.
[m] Jam. ii. 2—4. [n] Acts x. 34. [o] 2 Cor. iv. 7.
[p] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [q] Isai. lxi. 3.

for in the very words before my text you are told, that "the kingdom and nation that will not serve his Church shall perish." Do not imagine that your elevation among men can procure for you any exemption from your duty to God; your distinctions only render your way to heaven more difficult. For persons elevated in society to be humbled and brought upon a level with the poorest of mankind, is no easy matter: but it *must* be done———O beg of God to accomplish it for you, by the mighty working of his power!———

To you who are of the lower classes I would say, Rejoice, that whilst your fellow-creatures perhaps are ready to despise you on account of the disadvantages under which you labour, God loves you, and made it a distinguishing feature of the Messiah's kingdom, that "the poor should have the Gospel preached to them[r]." Whatever the rich may imagine, you of the two are more favoured of God than they: for whilst "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven," "God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom[s]." Labour then to secure this privilege: and, though you have none of the external recommendations of the pine and fir, you need not fear but that God will accept your services, and make you "pillars in his Temple that shall go no more out[t]."]

2. Let us all endeavour to promote the establishment of it in the world—

[Low as the state of the Church at present is, it shall one day, like the stone which Nebuchadnezzar saw, "become a mountain, and fill the whole earth[u]." "The mountain of the Lord's House shall be established on the top of the mountains; and all nations shall flow unto it[x]." The stateliest trees shall then be as ambitious of contributing to its glory, as those of the humblest growth." Let us then, in an assured prospect of that day, send forth workmen to Lebanon, to fell the lofty firs, and to bring in the humble box[y]———So shall the sanctuary of God be enlarged and beautified, and his name be glorified throughout all the earth.]

[r] Matt. xi. 5. [s] Jam. ii. 5. [t] Rev. iii. 12.
[u] Dan. ii. 35. [x] Isai. ii. 2.

[y] If this were the subject of *a Mission Sermon*, the thought of heathens and savages in every quarter of the world flocking to Christ, "as doves to their windows," (ver. 8.) might here be opened to advantage.

DXXXVI.

BLESSEDNESS OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE.

Isai. lxi. 9. *All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.*

IN the different countries of the world, the inhabitants are characterized by distinctive differences in their features; and from generation to generation, notwithstanding the vast diversity of countenances, that peculiarity of cast pervades them all. Yet, amidst all the nations where they are scattered, the descendants of Abraham may be clearly discerned from the original inhabitants of the soil: they all shew, by their countenances, their relation to their common parent. And may we not say respecting his spiritual children also, that *they* may be distinguished from others? True it is, that in outward appearance they resemble those around them; but in heart, in spirit, and in life, they are different from all the world; and yet, however distant from each other in climate, in education, and in habits, they all resemble each other, and bear the stamp and character of God, as their common Father.

In the passage before us, which foretells the increase of the Church in the Apostolic and Millennial periods, this circumstance is noticed: a peculiar blessedness is said to belong to the people of the Lord, even such a blessedness as should be visible to all who beheld them, and should distinguish them from all other persons on the face of the earth. In confirmation of this singular fact, we propose to shew,

I. That the Lord's people are pre-eminently blessed—

1. They are so—

[Consult *the names given to them* in the holy Scriptures: they are "the children of light," "the children of obedience," "the children of God;" whilst all others are the children of darkness, of disobedience, of the wicked one———Consider *the state into which they are brought*, a state of pardon, of peace, of holiness, of joy; whilst the whole world besides lieth in wickedness, and are utter strangers to all the blessings of the New Covenant———Consider further *their prospects in the future*

future world, they being made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; whilst to all others there is nothing but "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation" to consume them———Are not such persons then "a blessed seed?"]

2. They were so, in God's purpose, before they came into the world—

[We are astonished that many who profess to approve of the Articles of the Church of England, should be so averse to hear the smallest mention made of the counsels and decrees of God. That it is not profitable to be always insisting upon them, we readily admit; and that to dive too curiously into them, as though we were capable of comprehending the deepest mysteries in them, is highly presumptuous: but we must not on that account keep them wholly out of view, or be afraid of speaking as the Scripture speaks. God did most assuredly know from all eternity who were, or should be, his; and he did "choose them in Christ before the foundation of the world," and "predestinate them to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself[a];" and "he gave them to Christ[b]," to be redeemed by his blood, to be saved by his grace, and to be made heirs of his glory[c]: yea, he "wrote their names in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world[d]." How truly blessed then must they be!———]

3. They will be so to all eternity—

[All their present privileges and blessings are only preparatory to their future state, when their happiness will be perfect, unchangeable, and everlasting. They are to be "made meet for their inheritance" in this world; and, when they are completely ready for their nuptials with their heavenly Bridegroom, he will come and take them to himself, that they may live for ever in the perfect fruition of his love[e]———To bring them to this, was God's original design in choosing them—To fit them for it, is the end of all his dispensations, both of providence and grace—And to possess it, is the one object which they have in view, in all their labours, in all their sufferings, in all their conflicts.]

Moreover, our text asserts that this their blessedness is visible to others, even to all who know them. We proceed therefore to inquire,

II. Whence it is that all who know them acknowledge this—

The world at large do not know them[f]: they stand at

[a] Eph. i. 4, 5. [b] John xvii. 2, 6. [c] 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.
[d] Rev. xiii. 8. [e] Rev. xix. 7. [f] 1 John iii. 1.

at so great a distance from the Lord's people, that they cannot properly be said to "*see*" them: and hence, from the indistinctness of their views, they imagine that these people are either vile hypocrites or deluded enthusiasts. But those who have an opportunity of ascertaining their real character, are constrained to acknowledge them as the blessed of the Lord. This conviction is wrought on the minds of others by,

1. Their delight in God—

[Their happiness is altogether in God, even in that God and Saviour who bought them with his blood: they delight in a sense of his favour, in the enjoyment of his presence, and in the performance of his will———In this respect they differ from all other men on the face of the earth. Others may render unto God some external services; but the Believer alone "loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," so as to serve him with all the powers and faculties of his soul ———Hence there arises to the Believer a peculiarity of character which elevates him above all other men, and makes it manifest that "he is of the seed which the Lord hath blessed."]

2. Their superiority to the world—

[Believers, though *in* the world, "are not *of* it, even as Jesus Christ himself was not of the world:" they rise above its maxims, its pleasures, its interests, its honours: "they are crucified to it, and consider it as crucified to them"——— But all other people are *of* the world: whether they live immersed in its cares, or secluded from its society, they still have their affections fixed on things below, and not on things above; and, however they may pretend to despise the world, they are in reality its votaries, as much as if they were following it in the more accustomed way. The monk in his cell lives to himself and to the flesh, as much as the voluptuary or the man of business———Now here is another visible mark of distinction between the children of God and others: they may possess, and may enjoy, much of this world; but "though they use this world, they do not abuse it;" though they discharge their duties in it, they are in no respect in bondage to it: and this also elevates their character in the eyes of all who know them, and distinguishes them as pre-eminently favoured of their God.]

3. Their activity in doing good—

[Like their Divine Master, they "go about doing *good*." This

This is, as it were, the element in which they delight to move: and, though they themselves are a very "little flock" in comparison of those around them, it will be found that almost every great and extensive charity has proceeded from them. Of the charities which relate to the souls of men and their edification in the faith of Christ, they, under God, are the sole authors: others may *contribute to* the spread of the Bible, the establishment of Missions, and the promotion of religion in various ways; but the proposals that first set on foot those charities will be found, perhaps universally, to have *originated* with men of real piety. Here again they differ from all around them; for though we thankfully acknowledge that there is a considerable portion of benevolence in many who are not truly devoted to God, yet there is no real zeal in them for the diffusion of the Gospel, and the salvation of a ruined world.]

4. The whole consistency of their conduct—

[Times and circumstances make no change in them. At all times, and under all circumstances, they are glad in non-essentials to consult the weakness of others: but in things essential they are equally unmoved by hopes or fears. They know not to please men, unless it be for their good to edification. They have but one rule, the written word of God; and to that they are determined to adhere in life and death. But this is a character peculiar to them. All other persons, how pertinacious soever they may be in some things, will relax in others, according as inclination or interest may lead them. In regard to honour and probity indeed a worldly man may be as immoveable as others; but in things relating either to the exercise or encouragement of vital godliness, he cannot possibly maintain an uniform tenor of conduct: he wants the principle which alone can produce a firm, uniform, and decided character: consequently where consistency in true religion is, there it will commend itself to all who are able to appreciate its value, and will stamp its possessor as a Child of God.]

ADVICE:

1. Let all be ambitious to attain this honour—

[To be acknowledged as the friends and favourites of earthly monarchs were no honour at all in comparison of that which is mentioned in our text. Yet this is within the reach of all. As for that common objection, "If God has not chosen me, how can I help myself?" it is impious in the extreme[s]. We have nothing to do with the decrees of God, any farther than to refer all good to him, as its true and only source: our duty is, not to dispute, but to obey: and if, in obedience to God's command, we will believe in the Lord Jesus

[s] Rom. ix. 19. 20.

Jesus Christ, we shall be numbered amongst his spiritual seed, and be "blessed in him with all spiritual and eternal blessings."]

2. Let those who possess it endeavour to walk worthy of it—

[Remarkable is that exhortation of St. Paul, in his Epistle to Timothy, "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his: BUT[h], *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*" Do we profess to be of the seed which the Lord has blessed? let us shew that we are so by our conduct and conversation. If we are "sons of God, we must be blameless and harmless, shining as lights in the world, and holding forth in our conduct the word of life[i]." It is in this way only that we can approve ourselves to be God's chosen people; and in this way only can we constrain our fellow-creatures to acknowledge the justice of our pretensions.]

[h] 2 Tim. ii. 19. The word Καὶ has this meaning, in this and many other places.

[i] Phil. ii. 15, 16.

DXXXVII.

THE BELIEVER CLAD WITH THE GARMENTS OF SALVATION.

Isai. lxi. 10. *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a Bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a Bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*

THE abruptness of this passage cannot but strike every one who reads it. But this is common in the prophetic writings. The Prophets are wont to pass over hundreds or even thousands of years, as though they were already past; and to represent as existing before their eyes, the things which shall exist at periods the most remote. It is in this way that they express their confidence in the truth of their own predictions, and encourage us also to look forward to the accomplishment of them with the fullest assurance.

The words are uttered, as it were, by the Jewish

Church at the period of their conversion to Christianity. In the three first verses of this chapter the Lord Jesus Christ declares his commission to save the world[a]. In the three next, the Jews, notwithstanding their desolate condition previous to that time, are assured of their participation in his benefits, being themselves restored to their own country, and converted to the faith of Christ. In the three next verses they are informed, that they shall be pre-eminently blessed, far above all that ever their nation experienced in its most favoured seasons; insomuch, that they shall be objects of admiration and envy through the whole Gentile world. These things being predicted, the Jewish Church is introduced as exulting in the actual experience of them: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God." But it is as members of the Christian Church that they use this language: and therefore without confining our attention to them, we shall consider our text as expressing,

I. The Believer's boast—

To boast in any thing of our own would be absurd and impious: but to boast in God is highly becoming; as David says, "In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever[b]."

The mercy vouchsafed to him is exceeding great—

[He is "clothed with the garments of salvation, and covered with a robe of righteousness," that has been formed for him by God himself. In the 6th verse of this chapter the Jews are informed, that "they, (not the tribe of Levi only, but their whole nation) shall be named the Priests of the Lord, and the Ministers of their God." Now for the priests there were certain garments appointed, wherein they were to minister, especially the linen ephod; which was intended to intimate to them the purity that became their high office. For the high priest there were some other "garments for glory and for beauty[c]." In reference to these it is that the Believer says, "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation;" for every Believer under the Christian dispensation is "a king and a priest unto his God[d]:" the whole body of them are "a royal priesthood[e]:" and for them a robe of righteousness

[a] ver. 1—3, with Luke iv. 17—21. [b] Ps. xliv. 8.
[c] Exod. xxviii. 2. [d] Rev. i. 6. [e] 1 Pet. ii. 9.

ousness is prepared, which shall be to them a garment of salvation. This robe of righteousness may be understood of that righteousness which the Lord Jesus Christ hath wrought out for his people by his own obedience unto death, and "which is unto all, and upon all, them that believe in him[f]." This is the righteousness which the prophet Daniel speaks of as to be brought in by the Messiah[g], and which St. Paul desired to possess, "not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which was of God by faith in Christ[h]." It is by imparting this righteousness to the Believer that "Christ is made righteousness unto him[i]," and that he acquires that title which is given him by all his people, "The Lord our Righteousness[k]."

But these garments of salvation may also be understood of that righteousness which the Holy Spirit imparts to all who believe in Christ. He forms them anew: he enables them to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ[l];" or, in other words, to "put off the old man, and to put on the new, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness[m]." This is the idea which the priestly garments were more immediately intended to convey: for though they were an outward covering, they were chiefly emblematic of inward purity; in reference to which it is said, "Ye shall be unto me *a kingdom of priests*, and *an holy nation*[n]." And this may well be called "a garment of salvation:" for, though it is not that which justifies us before God, it constitutes our meetness for the heavenly inheritance[o], and is that "without which no man shall see the Lord[p]."

With these garments and this robe is the Believer clothed: the very moment he comes to Christ, the one is imputed to him, so that he is "accepted in the Beloved[q];" and the other is begun within him, to be progressively advanced and "perfected unto the day of Christ[r]."]

In this he may well boast—

[So far is it from being an act of presumption to boast in this, it is the Believer's duty to do so: for the prophet Isaiah expressly says, "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory[s]." The Believer *ought* to contemplate the mercies he has received, and to acknowledge the goodness of God in conferring them upon him. If he did not give glory thus unto his God, "the very stones would cry out against him."]

Such

[f] Rom. iii. 22. [g] Dan. ix. 24. [h] Phil. iii. 9. [i] 1 Cor. i. 30.
[k] Jer. xxiii. 6. [l] Rom. xiii. 14. [m] Eph. iv. 24. [n] Exod. xix. 6.
[o] Col. i. 12. [p] Heb. xii. 14. [q] Eph. i. 6. [r] Phil. i. 6.
[s] Isai. xlv. 24, 25.

Such being the Believer's experience, we shall not wonder at,

II. His determination—

When the blessed Virgin was congratulated on the mercy vouchsafed to her, she burst forth into this devout acknowledgment, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour[t]." So every Believer, reviewing the mercies conferred on him, says, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God." And this determination is,

1. Highly reasonable—

[Contemplate the comparison which the prophet himself institutes between the ornaments thus put on the Believer, and those in which persons are wont to deck themselves at the celebration of their nuptials: for "he is covered with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." Are they happy in the prospect of their union, and shall not he be happy in the union which has already taken place between Christ and his soul? For it is not only to *serve* his God that he is now brought, but to *enjoy* him; and *that* too in an union the most intimate and endeared that can possibly be conceived. A man and his wife are one flesh; but "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit[u]." Nor is this union in prospect merely, but in actual existence. From the moment that the Believer is clothed with the garments of salvation, he is espoused to his God: he is set apart for God; and God reserves himself, as it were, for him[x]: and in due time the union will be perfected in glory. And does not this call for joy and thanksgiving? See what feelings it will create in heaven, the very instant that the period shall have arrived when the Spouse shall be presented to her Lord, to be happy for ever in more immediate fellowship with him: "A voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him both small and great. And I heard, as it were, the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and *his wife hath made herself ready*. And to her was granted, that she should be *arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of Saints*[y]." Shall the Believer then stay till he arrives in heaven before he begins

[t] Luke i. 46, 47. [u] 1 Cor. vi. 17. [x] Hos. iii. 3.
[y] Rev. xix. 5—8.

begins his joy? No: the language of his heart and lips should be that of David; "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall *make her boast* in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me; and let us exalt his name together[z]." Thus will he not be contented with praising God himself: he will stir up all around, to join him in this delightful, this reasonable service.]

2. Most pleasing to God—

[The command of God to every Believer is, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice[a]." "Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him; and the Children of Zion be joyful in their King[b]." Indeed it is in this way only that we can give him the honour due unto his name. It may appear as if our poor praises were nothing: and it is true that they can add nothing to the Lord: but still it is true, that is the tribute which he requires, and by which he considers himself as honoured: "Whoso offereth me praise, glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God[c]."]

APPLICATION,

1. Let none put away this honour, as too great for him to expect—

[It is not uncommon for persons of a desponding frame to think that such privileges and blessings are not for *them*. But can any one be in a more hopeless state than the Jews? View them in any light; and say whether there is, humanly speaking, any probability of their being brought to the state described in the preceding context, and to the frame expressed in our text? Yet that shall be: nor shall all the powers of darkness ever prevent it. Be strong then, and of good courage, thou desponding soul; and go unto thy God with the prayer of faith. Then, though thou hast been like the prodigal in extravagance and sin, thou shalt be clothed in the best robe that is in thy Father's house, and "be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy[d]."]

2. Let none abuse this honour to the purposes of licentiousness—

[There are those who "turn the very grace of God into licentiousness;" and who pervert the doctrine of imputed righteousness to sanction and to justify their continuance in sin. But it is a certain fact, that Christ is never made righteousness

[z] Ps. xxxiv. 1—3. [a] Phil. iv. 4. [b] Ps. cxlix. 2.
[c] Ps. l. 23. [d] Jude, ver. 24.

eousness to any man, without being made his sanctification also[e]." If Christ have redeemed you by his blood, it is that you may be made a peculiar people, zealous of good works[f]." Without this inward change, all your joy and glorying will be an empty boast: and "every sacrifice which you offer to your God, will be an abomination to him[g]." You well know the fate of him who presumed to sit down at the marriage supper, not having on a wedding garment: and if he, a mere guest, "was cast out into outer darkness," what must be the fate of one who should claim the privileges of the Bride herself, whilst yet she possessed not the only qualities that could endear her to the Lord? Be assured, you must "be all glorious within, and have your clothing also of wrought gold," if you would find acceptance with the King of kings, and "be brought with gladness and rejoicing to the palace" of the heavenly Bridegroom[h].]

[e] 1 Cor. i. 30. [f] Tit. ii. 14. [g] Prov. xv. 8. [h] Ps. xlv. 13—15.

DXXXVIII.

THE DUTY OF INTERCEDING FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD.

Isai. lxii. 6, 7. *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*

IT is melancholy to reflect, that notwithstanding God has given a revelation of himself to man above three thousand years, there is not a sixth part of mankind that has ever so much as heard of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. And, of those who are called Christians, a very small portion indeed has any vital union with Christ, or experimental knowledge of his love. In this view, even the Church itself may be termed Forsaken, and Desolate. But it will not be always thus. There is a period fixed in the Divine councils, when the Church, being enlarged by vast accessions from every quarter of the globe, shall be called Hephzi-bah, and Beulah; seeing that the Lord will delight in her, and regard her as his Bride[a].

To the hastening forward of that blessed time we all

[a] ver. 4, 5.

all *may* contribute, and all *ought* to contribute to the utmost of our power. How we may be instrumental to the glorious work, we are told in the words before us: in considering which we shall shew,

I. What should be the great object of our solicitude—

As having immortal souls, we are all concerned in the first place to seek salvation for ourselves. But our anxiety should extend to the Church, and to the whole world: we should desire not only to prosper in our own souls, but to see "Jerusalem," even the Church of the living God, prospering also, so as to be "a praise in the earth." In a word, our desire should be,

1. That the *light* of the Gospel should be universally *diffused*—

[In the Gospel is contained the brightest discovery of all the Divine perfections as united and harmonizing in the work of Redemption: it is an exhibition of "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"———

Now, in comparison of this, the works of creation have no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth: the sun itself is darkness when compared with "the Sun of Righteousness that hath arisen on the world with healing in his wings"———

And where, but in the Church, is this glory seen? Not one ray of it shines in the whole world besides———

The Church then is "a praise in the earth," in proportion as this light shines forth in the earth: But alas! at present the greatest part of the world is under an eclipse. We hope, however, that in due time every intervening object will be removed; and that the light now rapidly spreading over the horizon, will extend its beams to regions that are yet lying in darkness and the shadow of death; and that it will shine, in its meridian splendor, not successively, but at once, on every portion of the habitable globe.

How greatly is this to be desired! If the light of civilization be esteemed a blessing, how much more must the light of Salvation be so; especially when, with that, the glory of God and of all his infinite perfections is displayed!———]

2. That the *efficacy* of the Gospel should be universally *experienced*—

[In two views especially is the efficacy of the Gospel seen, namely, in comforting, and sanctifying, all who embrace it. To what unspeakable comfort it raises an afflicted soul, is declared at large by the prophet Isaiah[b];——— as its

[b] Isai. lxi. 1—3.

its sanctifying power is by the prophet Jeremiah[c]:——— and in both views it is "for a name of joy, a praise, and an honour, before all the nations of the earth[d]." Its effect is uniformly to change a wilderness into a fertile garden[e]; and to fill with the choicest shrubs the ground that was covered only with briers and thorns[f]. Conceive this change effected in any place, What honour must accrue to that which causes the change, and what blessedness to the place where such a change is seen! Would such a spot be as Goshen in the midst of Egypt? Such then is the Church, wherever the Gospel comes in its power; and such will the Church be in the whole earth, when once it shall have attained its destined extent and eminence. And is not this an object to be desired by all? Truly, if we have one spark of love to our fellow-creatures, or of zeal for God, we should look forward to that event as the consummation and completion of all our wishes.]

That object then being so desirable, let us consider,

II. In what way we should all endeavour to promote it—

All may be instrumental in helping it forward:

1. Ministers—

[They are "watchmen set on the walls of Jerusalem," and are commanded "not to hold their peace day nor night." In this expression there may possibly be a reference to those under the Law who ministered in the sanctuary by night as well as by day[g]. Whether their "not holding their peace refers to any public addresses, which, under the Gospel, are to be made from day to day by those who sustain the office of the Ministry, we do not certainly know: but we are sure that it comprehends at least, if it do not exclusively relate to, the great work of intercession; in which Ministers ought exceedingly to abound. Whatever personal efforts they may make, they can do no good, if God himself do not interpose to make their work effectual: "Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but God alone can give the increase." Ministers must pray, yea, must continue instant in prayer "night and day," if they would be successful in their ministrations[h].]

2. People of every description—

[All who "make mention of the Lord" are bidden to intercede for the Church of God. But in the marginal translation those words are rendered "All the Lord's Remembrancers." This is the character which we are all to bear: God says, "Put me in remembrance[i]." We are to remind him

[c] Jer. xxxiii. 6—8. [d] ib. ver. 9. [e] Isai. xxxv. 1, 2. & li. 3.
[f] Isai. lv. 13. [g] Ps. cxxxiv. 1.
[h] Compare Acts xx. 31. with 1 Thess. iii. 10. & 2 Tim. i. 3.
[i] Isai. xliii. 26.

him of all his gracious promises, just as Jacob did [k], and, like Jacob, to wrestle with him till we prevail: yea, in the confidence of success we should say, like him, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!." This is frequently inculcated in the New Testament: the example of the Canaanitish woman, and the parable of the importunate widow, are intended to shew us, that we should "pray and not faint," and that God will hear "those who pray day and night unto him, though he bear long with them [m]."

Now, though we are not to imagine that there is any reluctance in God to bless his Church, yet we are to persevere in prayer exactly as if we hoped to prevail by dint of importunity; yea, we are to "*give God himself no rest*," till he arise and execute the desired work. In this way the lowest Christian in the world may render more service to the Church of God, than either Ministers or Princes can in any other way: a human arm, however active or powerful, can put forth only a small measure of strength; but prayer can call Omnipotence to its aid, and effect whatever is necessary for the Church's welfare. Whilst the success of Elijah remains written for our instruction [n], no man has any right to ask, What can such a weak creature as I effect for the Church of God?]

This subject affords ample matter,

1. For reproof—

[How little have any of us considered the duty, and the efficacy of intercession! Instead of praying day and night for the enlargement of the Church, many of us find it difficult even to pray for ourselves: and are well content that God should "rest," and that the world should perish in their sins, provided that we ourselves may be excused the trouble of exertion, and finally escape the wrath of God. Who amongst us does not blush at a review of his conduct in relation to this matter? Who, instead of fulfilling his duty as God's Remembrancer, does not himself need a remembrancer to remind him of his duty? Let this matter be duly considered amongst us; and let us no longer, like Jonah, be indulging in sleep, when a whole world of sinners is calling for our utmost exertions [o].]

2. For encouragement—

[The first verse of this chapter deserves particular attention: it is spoken by the same person that speaks in our text: it is Christ himself, or, at least, the prophet in his name, who says, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and

[k] Gen. xxxii. 12. [l] ib. ver. 24—26.
[m] Matt. xv. 22—28. & Luke xviii. 1—8. [n] Jam. v. 16—18.
[o] Jon. i. 5, 6.

and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." Now here is the very point which we ought supremely to desire: *this is the true import of that expression, "Jerusalem being a praise in the earth"*——— Does *God* then fix his eye upon this glorious object? and shall not *we?* Is *he* constantly intent upon it? and shall not *we?* Is he determined of his own mind to take no rest till he has accomplished it? and shall not we be encouraged to pray to him respecting it? If he were averse to it, we might despair of ever prevailing upon him to change his mind: but when we know how entirely his own mind is bent upon it, and that he is ordering every thing both in providence and grace with a view to it, we may well besiege the throne of Grace, to remind him of his promises. Let us take courage then, and plead, if peradventure we may hasten forward the glorious day, and see, if not in the world at large, yet at least in our own immediate circle, Jerusalem to be indeed "a praise in the earth."]

DXXXIX.

RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Isai. lxii. 10—12. *Go through, go through the gates: prepare you the way of the people: cast up, cast up the high-way; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord; and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.*

TRULY wonderful is the power of faith: it looks through hundreds and thousands of years; and not only anticipates events as future, but sets them before the mind as present. In the prophetic writings this assured faith is frequently exhibited. The prophet Isaiah in particular seems to have been endued with it in a pre-eminent degree. He rarely mentions the conversion either of Jews or Gentiles to the faith of Christ, but he represents it as already passing before his eyes: "Lift up thine eyes round about, says he, and see," these prophecies already accomplishing throughout the world "Who are these that I behold flying as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"

windows[a]?" In the chapter before us God had declared, that "he would not rest till he had caused the righteousness of his Church to go forth as brightness, and its salvation as a lamp that burneth[b]." And this promise he had confirmed with an oath[c]. To this word and this oath the prophet gave such perfect and assured credit, that he addressed the Jews above an hundred years before they were carried captive to Babylon, as if they were already at the close of their captivity, and ready to be restored to their own land: "Go through, go through the gates," for the purpose of returning to your own country. At the same time he looks forward also to the Jews in their present state of dispersion, and bids them receive their Messiah as already come for their deliverance; assuring them at the same time, that in returning to God through Him, they shall be restored to all the privileges which by their rejection of him they have forfeited.

His address to them sets forth in a very animated point of view the circumstances that shall take place at the time of their restoration;

I. The preparation to be made for them—

The former part of the address is directed immediately to them. As at the time of Cyrus's decree vast multitudes needed to be stirred up to avail themselves of the permission granted them to return to their own country, so now, when the gates are opened to them, they need repeated exhortations, "Go through, go through the gates." God says to them, "Go ye forth of Babylon; flee ye from the Chaldeans; with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, 'The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob.' 'Depart ye; for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rear-ward[d].'"

The remainder of the address is directed to all who have it in their power to facilitate their return.

Here

[a] Isai. xlix. 18. & lx. 4, 8. [b] ver. 1. [c] ver. 8, 9.
[d] Isai. xlviii. 20.

Here therefore we may see our duty towards them. We should without delay exert ourselves in their behalf:

1. We should prepare their way before them—

[As, previous to the advent of our Lord himself, a Messenger was sent before him "to prepare *his* way, and to make *his* paths straight[e]," so God commands that we should "prepare the way of *the people*," whom he has scattered over the face of the whole earth. In order to facilitate their access to their own land, and to the heavenly Jerusalem, we should "gather out the stones," "the stumbling-blocks" which lie in their way[ee]; and "cast up an high-way" over those morasses, which present an almost insuperable obstacle to their return. If it be asked, What are these stumbling-blocks, and these morasses? I answer, One stumbling-block is, the ungodly lives of Christians; which give the Jews but too much reason to conclude that our religion is not a whit better than their own. Another stumbling-block is, The contempt with which we have treated them, and which cannot but have incensed them against, not the followers only, but even the very name of Christ. The divisions of the Christian Church present also a very serious obstacle in their way: and we should do all in our power to heal these divisions, so that, if there still remain *a diversity of sentiment* on points of doubtful disputation, there may at least be *an union of heart* amongst all "who hold fast the head," and who, we have reason to hope, are living members of Christ's mystical body. Till they see some change in *our conduct* in these respects, we can scarcely hope to prevail upon them to embrace *our principles*, however strongly we may recommend and enforce them.]

2. We should "lift up the standard" of the cross to them—

[That is the standard which must be erected for the Gentile world[f], and to that the Jewish people also must resort[g]. Under that must all mankind be marshalled[h], and come up to Zion[i]. But how shamefully negligent have the Christian world been now for so many centuries, in not unfurling these banners to them, and endeavouring to enlist them into the service of our Lord! Never till lately have our Scriptures been translated into their language for their use; nor has ever any great and general effort been made to promote their conversion to the faith of Christ. It is only in a way of pains and penalties that they have been dealt with hitherto,

[e] Isai. xl. 3—5. with Luke iii. 4—6. [ee] Isai. lvii. 14.
[f] Isai. xi. 10. [g] ib. ver. 11, 12. [h] Zech. xiv. 9. [i] Mic. iv. 1.

hitherto, and not in a way of kind instruction and affectionate admonition. But till this be done, what prospect is there of their conversion to the faith of Christ? Suitable means must be used: and I beg it to be particularly noticed, that *God enjoins these means to be used, in order to the effecting of his gracious purposes towards them.* Let not any one imagine that the Jews are to be converted in any other way than the Gentiles were. There were miracles in the Apostolic age: but they were to aid, and not to supersede, the labours of men. So there *may* possibly be miracles in the Millennial age: but it is by instruction alone that the Jews can be brought to the knowledge of the Gospel, and to a faith in Christ as the true Messiah.]

To these general directions the prophet more distinctly adds,

II. The proclamation to be reported to them—

It has been thought by some, that we are under no obligation to seek the conversion of the Jews. But, not to mention the general order given to Ministers to go forth and preach the Gospel to *every creature,* (which must include Jews as well as Gentiles,) here is in our text an express command, *a proclamation from Almighty God himself, to* the whole *Gentile world,* to say unto the *Daughter of Zion,* "Behold, thy salvation cometh!" Let not this be forgotten: it is binding upon every one of us: and, if we disregard the injunction, we disregard it at our peril. We are here directed to make known to them, by every possible means,

1. The Saviour's advent—

[The true character of the Messiah is here declared: He is a Saviour: He is "salvation" itself; even the salvation of all who trust in him. "His reward is with him; and it shall be conferred on all who receive him in faith and love. Who can depict the blessings which he will bring to the believing soul? They are such as "no eye ever saw, no ear ever heard, no heart ever adequately conceived." "The peace" with which he will invest the soul, "passeth all understanding;" "the joy" with which he will inspire it, is "unspeakable;" and the "riches" with which he will endow it, are "unsearchable." Let the Believer, though but of the lowest class, be appealed to, and he will confirm this truth from his own experience. Moreover, "his work is before him;" and he will never leave it till it be fully accomplished. In the days of his flesh, he rested not till he could say, "It is finished:" nor will he

he rest now till he has fulfilled all that he has undertaken, and brought every one of his elect to glory. "Of those that were given him of the Father, he never lost one, nor will ever suffer one to be plucked out of his hands."

All this is to be made known to the Jewish people. They should be informed what a Saviour there is: we should bring to their ears these glad tidings, "lifting up our voice with strength, and saying to all the cities of Judah, Behold your God[k]!"]

2. The benefits he will confer upon them—

[Desolate indeed is their condition at present: but it shall not be always so: the time is coming when they shall "no more be termed, Forsaken[l];" but shall be restored to all the honours and blessings which they once possessed. Once they were "an holy people to the Lord their God, even a special people above all upon the face of the earth[m];" and "high above them all, in praise, and in name, and in honour[n]." And such shall they again become, when they unite in "seeking the Lord their God, and David their king[o]." As partakers of his mercies in common with the Gentile world, they will be called, "The redeemed of the Lord;" but with an emphasis peculiar to themselves will they be termed, "Sought out, and not forsaken." They appear to be forsaken at present: but it shall then appear, that God's eye was upon them for good even in the midst of their deepest humiliation; and efforts shall be made for their recovery, which shall distinguish them pre-eminently as objects of his love, whom he has "*sought out*" with care, and brought home with joy.

Such are the encouraging statements to be made to them; and such statements in God's good time shall be effectual for the bringing of them home in triumph to their God.]

That I may not overlook the personal interests of those to whom I speak, let me in CONCLUSION say,

1. Take care that you experience these things in your own souls—

[In your natural and unconverted state, you are as far off from God as the Jews themselves. You are "in a world that lieth under the power of the wicked one[p]:" and you need to come out from it, as much as they did from Babylon[q]———— You need also to have "straight paths made for your feet," that you may advance the more easily towards the heavenly Jerusalem.

[k] Isai. xl. 9. [l] ver. 4. [m] Deut. vii. 6.
[n] Deut. xxvi. 19. [o] Hos. iii. 5.
[p] 1 John v. 19. Ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ.
[q] 2 Cor. vi. 17. compared with Isai. lii. 17.

Jerusalem[r]. The same encouragements too you need, in order to induce you to embrace the proffered salvation. The excellency of the Redeemer, the riches of his grace, the fulness and certainty of his salvation, need to be set before you, and the honours and glories of the eternal world held forth to your view; that so you may brave the dangers of a dreary wilderness, and seek your happiness in Zion. There is not, in fact, any thing to be done by a Jew, that is not to be done by you———Go forth then yourselves, and shew the way to your Jewish Brethren: and let them see in you the excellence of that religion which you exhort them to embrace.]

2. Endeavour to promote the experience of them in your Jewish Brethren—

[I beg leave to repeat what I have before asserted, that it is by the use of suitable means that God will accomplish their conversion. See what means the Apostles used, in the first ages of the Church. Such are we also to use in the present day. If this be doubted, let any man tell us, Where has God dispensed with them? My text, even if there were no other passage to the same effect, sufficiently shews, that he has not dispensed with means, but requires them to be used by us in an humble dependence upon him. Let the directions of the text then be followed by us. Let us endeavour to shew them, that God has now made a way for their return to him. Let us labour by all possible means to remove from them the stumbling-blocks that lie in their way, and by courtesy and love to smooth their way before them. Let us encourage them to the utmost of our power, by pointing out to them the Messiah, of whom their Law and their Prophets have so fully testified; and by setting before them the great and precious promises which God has given them of acceptance through him. I say, let us strive in earnest to convey to them the blessings, which, through the labours of their forefathers, we ourselves have received. "Freely we have received; let us freely give:" and, if but a single soul be given us as the fruit of our labours, let us remember, that that one soul is of more value than the whole world.]

[r] Heb. xii. 13.

DXL.

MESSIAH'S TRIUMPHS.

Isai. lxiii. 1. *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.*

TO us who are accustomed to view the whole plan of Christianity accomplished, the tidings of our Lord's resurrection are heard without any particular emotion. The subversion of a dynasty that has spread desolation and misery through one quarter of the globe, is occupying every mind and every tongue[a]: but the subversion of Satan's empire over the whole world, and the destruction of sin and Satan, death and hell, by the resurrection of Christ, is regarded as an old uninteresting tale. It was not however so uninteresting to the first Disciples: when they were mourning under the most grievous disappointment, and were informed that their Lord was risen from the dead, they could not believe it: and when some who had ascertained the fact, went to inform the others, they were considered as visionaries, who were either deceiving or deceived: but when the point was fully established, nothing could exceed the joy that pervaded every breast. Somewhat of that holy feeling was expressed by the prophet, in the words before us. Certain it is, that our Church so understands the passage; because it is appointed to be read, instead of an Epistle, on the Monday preceding Easter. Nor can there be any doubt that this is its real import. It is to Jesus that the questions in our text refer; and he it is who gives the answer to them. Let us consider then our text,

I. In a way of solemn inquiry—

There are those who think the person spoken of was Judas Maccabeus; because he gained a great victory over the Edomites, who were afterwards compelled to embrace the Jewish religion. But it is evident, that the words cannot refer to him, because he could not possibly speak of himself in such terms as are used both in our text and in the following verses[b]. It is to the Lord Jesus Christ alone that the words can with any propriety be applied.

The

[a] Preached April 10th, 1814, the morning that the news of Buonaparté's abdication of the throne of France was announced at Cambridge.

[b] ver. 4.

The Edomites, as being the most bitter enemies of the Jews[c], were types and figures of the Church's enemies, on whom God has decreed to take signal vengeance[d]: and it is probable that the full accomplishment of this prophecy in its literal sense is yet to come. But in its mystical and spiritual sense it has already been fulfilled, by the triumphs of our Lord Jesus Christ over all his spiritual enemies.

He triumphed over them upon his cross—

[It seemed as if his enemies *then* triumphed over him: but he never triumphed more than in the hour when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. It is true, that Satan then bruised his *heel;* but he bruised Satan's *head,* and inflicted a wound that will issue in his everlasting destruction[e]. Previous to this final combat he proclaimed the certain conquest[f]; and in it he gained the victory. He entered, as it were, into the very palace of the god of this world, and spoiled his goods[g]; yea, "he spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell, triumphing over them openly on the cross[h]." It was by making atonement for sin that he effected reconciliation between God and man———— and thus "by his death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered from their "sore bondage" the countless millions of his redeemed[i].]

He triumphed over them still more in his resurrection and ascension—

[If in his death he discharged our debt, in his resurrection he was liberated from the prison of the grave, and declared to have fulfilled every thing that was necessary for man's salvation. Hence he is represented as a mighty Conqueror, surrounded by myriads of the heavenly host, and "leading captivity itself captive," dragging, as it were, at his chariot wheels, the vanquished powers of darkness[k]. In his death the victory was gained; but in his resurrection and ascension the triumph was celebrated, and proclaimed. Hence to these the apostle Peter refers us, as unquestionable evidences of his Messiahship, and as demonstrations that he is the only Saviour of the world[l].]

He has carried on, and will ere long complete, his triumphs in the gathering together of his elect people from every quarter of the globe—

[On

[c] Am. i. 11, 12. [d] Isai. xxxiv. 5, 6. [e] Gen. iii. 15.
[f] John xii. 31. & xvi. 11. [g] Luke xi. 21, 22. [h] Col. ii. 15.
[i] Heb. ii. 14, 15. [k] Col. ii. 15. [l] Acts ii. 32—36.

[On the day of Pentecost he rescued three thousand vassals from Satan's tyrannic sway: and from that day has he set at liberty multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles, by the operation of his grace upon their hearts. Yet daily too is he still gaining more and more ground on the dominions of the wicked one; and ere long will his triumphs be complete, when "all the kingdoms of the world" shall acknowledge him as their Sovereign, their Saviour, and their God.]

Let us now view the words of our text,

II. In a way of devout reflection—

The mode of expression used by the prophet, naturally leads us to this, as indeed the most appropriate view. When he asks, "Who is this?" he intends to express his admiration of the object; just as the prophet Micah does of Jehovah, "Who is a God like unto thee[m]? Let us then contemplate our adorable Saviour, as exhibited to us in our text: let us contemplate,

1. The representation given of him—

[Commentators who interpret this passage of the Saviour, as having his garments dyed with *his own* blood, quite mistake its meaning: it is with the blood of his enemies that he is covered, just as a warrior may be supposed to be, when returning from the slaughter of his enemies. And this is the view frequently given of him in the holy Scriptures. His garments previous to the battle[n]———, together with his going forth to the engagement[o]———, and the slaughter consequent upon it[p]———, are described in other parts of Holy Writ; and by them is our interpretation of this passage elucidated and confirmed. Let us then behold with admiration this mighty Conqueror, now so "glorious in his apparel, and travelling in the greatness of his strength." He appears not as one exhausted with fatigue, but as one whom no enemy can resist. Let us ascribe to him the honour due unto his name; and let the song by which the typical victory of Jehovah at the Red Sea was celebrated, be sung by us; for our Jesus "hath triumphed gloriously:" "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[q]?"]

2. The description given of himself—

[In his reply to the question, "Who is this?" he informs us

[m] Mic. vii. 18. [n] Isai. lix. 16, 17. [o] Ps. xlv. 3—5.
[p] Rev. xix. 11—18, 21. Mark especially ver. 13, 16.
[q] Exod. xv. 1, 3—11.

us who he is; "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Not only does he "speak *in* righteousness," as the true and faithful witness, but he speaks *of* righteousness, and is the great Herald that proclaims it to a ruined world. He himself has by his death "brought in an everlasting righteousness[r]," which shall be "unto all, and upon all, that believe in him[s]." Hear with what extreme earnestness he proclaims it to the whole world[t]: and shall we not adore such a Benefactor as He? Shall sinners, who have no righteousness of their own, "be made the righteousness of God in him[u]," and not exult? Shall they not glory in him as "The Lord their righteousness[x]," and boast, each one for himself, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[y]?"

But consider further how "mighty he is to save:" he is "a Saviour and a Great One[z]," even "a Prince and a Saviour[a];" or rather, as he is called by an inspired Apostle, "The great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ[b]." This is the great argument whereby he encourages us all to trust in him; "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; *for I am God*[c]!" and this is the view in which all his Ministers are commanded to hold him forth: we must "lift up our voice with strength, and say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God[d]!"

Whilst then from "his garments dyed in blood" we discern how able he is to destroy, let us remember, that he is able also to save[e], yea, "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him[f]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who believe in him—

[Keep your eyes steadily fixed on this glorious Saviour: and remember, that "*he trod the wine-press alone*[g];" there was none with him in the conflict he sustained; nor must any one presume to claim a share in the honour of his victories: his was the power; his must be the glory. So indeed must be the glory of all that is wrought in us; for it is by his grace alone that we can do even the smallest good. Let him then be gratefully acknowledged as "the Author and the finisher" of your whole salvation.]

2. Those who entertain no admiring thoughts of him—

[O that you would reflect, how terrible it will be to be found amongst his enemies! Let it suffice that his garments are

[r] Dan. ix. 24. [s] Rom. iii. 22. [t] Isai. li. 4—6. [u] 2 Cor. v. 21.
[x] Jer. xxiii. 6. [y] Isai. xlv. 24, 25. [z] Isai. xix. 20.
[a] Acts v. 31. [b] Tit. ii. 13. [c] Isai. xlv. 22. [d] Isai. xl. 9, 10.
[e] Jam. iv. 12. [f] Heb. vii. 25. [g] ver. 3.

are dyed with the blood of others; and let them not be dyed with *your* blood. In the very passage before us, he tells us how insupportable his wrath will be[h]: O provoke it not! but humble yourselves before him, whilst yet the day of mercy lasts: for "God has set him upon his holy hill of Zion," and has engaged to make all "his enemies his footstool." And be assured that if you will not bow before the sceptre of his grace, he will "break you in pieces as a potter's vessel[i]."]

[h] ver. 6. [i] Ps. ii. 6. 9.

DXLI.

THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF THE LORD.

Isai. lxiii. 7. *I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses.*

NOTHING conduces more to the production of true repentance than a view of the mercies of our God. A sight of sin only will often lead to despondency; or, if attended with a determination to seek for mercy, will never melt the soul into deep contrition. It is the contrasted view of God's goodness, and of our own depravity, that alone begets ingenuous shame, and unfeigned self-abhorrence: it is from thence alone that we derive the complete knowledge of our own vileness, and are enabled to maintain a hope of acceptance with God, notwithstanding all our desert of his wrath and indignation.

In the latter part of this chapter, and the whole of the next, we have a confession, which seems to have been drawn up for the use of the Church when they should be in captivity in Babylon. But the prayer itself begins with the words of our text; wherein we have an acknowledgment of God's unbounded goodness to his people; an acknowledgment, which is amplified and illustrated in the following verses by a variety of particulars. In this view it was an excellent preparation for that self-abasement which they were to express in the subsequent confession.

We shall find it a profitable subject for our present contemplation to consider the loving-kindness of our God

God to us: and that we may confine our thoughts within a proper limit, we shall shew,

I. What there is in the loving-kindness of our God that deserves particular notice—

It is obvious, that the subject, taken in all its latitude, is absolutely inexhaustible. But by confining our attention to some prominent parts of it, we shall be enabled to form a just conception of the whole, without being distracted by too great a variety of particulars. Let us then notice,

1. Its freeness and sovereignty—

[The freeness of God's mercies is that which constitutes their first and most distinguishing feature: without adverting to that, we can never have any just conception of them at all. If we suppose God to have any respect to human *merit*, and to confer his favours *on account of that*, we undermine the principal foundations of our gratitude, and take honour to ourselves in exact proportion as we ought to give glory unto him. But a very little reflection will suffice to shew us, that God is altogether sovereign in the distribution of his favours. Who made the difference between the apostate angels and fallen man? or what was there in us, rather than in them, that induced God to provide a Saviour for us, when no such mercy was vouchsafed to them? Who has made the difference between the benighted Heathens and ourselves? or wherein have we merited that God should send us the light of revelation, when they are left in darkness and the shadow of death, and given up to follow their own delusions? If we prosecute the same inquiry in relation to the distinctions visible amongst ourselves, we shall be constrained to come to the same conclusion; "By the grace of God we are what we are." It is manifest, that still, as in former ages, "things which are hid from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes;" and the only reason we can give for it, is that which our Lord himself assigned, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight[a]." Whether therefore we look at our rank in society, our intellects, our bodily constitution, or our attainments in grace, we must confess, that it is "God, and God alone, that has made any of us to differ[b]."]

2. Its richness and variety—

[Were we to attempt to enumerate particulars, we should not know where to begin, or where to end. The mercies we enjoy *as men*, in contradistinction to all the rest of the creation, are unspeakably great———Nor should we overlook those which

[a] Matt. xi. 25, 26. See also Ezek. xvi. 3—6. [b] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

which we possess *as Britons*[c]———but, above all, those which we enjoy *as Christians*, deserve our most attentive consideration. That we have a Saviour to whom we may flee for refuge, and who is able and willing to save us to the uttermost; that we have the aids of the Holy Spirit promised to us for the renovating of our fallen nature; that the invitations and promises of the Gospel are yet sounding in our ears, when so many millions of our fellow-creatures have received their final doom, and are gone beyond a possibility of redemption; these things, I say, display in its brightest colours the loving-kindness of our God to *us;* and therefore we should meditate upon them day and night.

We have a striking pattern for our imitation in Nehemiah: he wished to impress the Jews with a sense of God's goodness to them, and therefore set it forth before them in a variety of most affecting particulars[d]: let *us* also, for the same end, recall to mind the mercies which we ourselves have experienced at his hands; and we shall find them countless as the sands upon the sea shore.]

3. Its constancy and continuance—

[After all, we scarcely know whether this be not the view in which the loving-kindness of our God appears to greatest advantage. This seemed to Nehemiah to be the crown and summit of God's mercies vouchsafed to the Jewish nation[e]: and certainly not even the greatness of his mercies astonishes us more than the continuance of them to us. Let us but reflect, how numerous our provocations have been, and what ungrateful returns we have made to God for all his loving-kindness, and we shall stand amazed at his patience, and long-suffering, and forbearance: we shall be surprised that he has not long since shut up his tender mercies in displeasure, and "sworn, in his wrath, that we should not enter into his rest." We shall then understand (what else is quite inexplicable) why David, in a psalm of only twenty-six verses, repeats no less than twenty-six times that "God's mercy endureth for ever[f]:" we shall see that to this, and to this alone, we owe it, that WE have not been consumed long ago[g].]

Let us proceed to consider,

II. In what manner, and for what ends, we should notice it—

And,

1. As to the manner—

[A mere speculative view of this subject is by no means that

[c] Here the particular occasion that is celebrated may be introduced.
[d] Neh. ix. 7—15. [e] Neh. ix. 16—21, 26—31.
[f] Ps. cxxxvi. [g] Lam. iii. 22.

that which becomes us. We should consider it with *the profoundest admiration, and the liveliest gratitude.*

One might as well expect a person to speak in a light manner of sin, as of the mercies of his God. There is something so vast and incomprehensible in the loving-kindness of God, that the very thought of it should utterly overwhelm us. The exclamation of St. Paul, when contemplating the decrees of Providence respecting the calling of the Gentiles and the restoration of the Jews, is that which suits us in reference to the subject before us; "O the depth! O the depth! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out[h]!" Even a Heathen, when restored to the exercise of his understanding, was so amazed at the goodness of Jehovah, that he exclaimed, "How great are his signs, and how mighty are his wonders[i]!" How much more then ought *we* to be impressed with it, to whom it is revealed in the stupendous work of Redemption! Surely the meditation of the prophet should be ever on our mind, and his words upon our lips; "How great is his goodness, how great is his beauty[k]!"

Yet, as the angels, who veil their faces and their feet before the Deity from a sense of their unworthiness to behold or serve him, do yet exert themselves to the utmost to exalt his name; so *we*, however incapable of comprehending fully the mercies of our God, should do our utmost to praise and glorify him on account of them. David stirred up "his soul, and all that was within him, to bless the Lord, who had crowned him with mercy and loving-kindness[l]." And we are taught by the prophet the precise terms, as it were, in which it becomes us to express our gratitude to God[m]. The very words of our text may serve to shew us in what manner our *admiration* and *gratitude* should be combined: if I may so speak, our admiration should be lively, and our gratitude profound.]

2. As to the ends—

[No other meditation, no subject of discourse, more imperiously demands your notice than this. You should reflect upon, and "mention" the loving-kindness of God, both *for the instruction of others,* and *the encouragement of your own souls.*

How are others to become acquainted with God, if you, whose understandings are enlightened, do not endeavour to instruct them? or to what purpose has God imparted to you the knowledge of himself, if you do not impart it to those around you? "Your light is not to be hid under a bushel, but to be put on a candlestick," that it may be a source of benefit

[h] Rom. xi. 33. [i] Dan. iv. 2, 3. [k] Zech. ix. 17.
[l] Ps. ciii. 1—4. [m] Isai. xii. 4—6.

benefit to others. It is the command of God that his mercies should be thus treasured up in the minds of all, and be transmitted by oral testimony from generation to generation[n]. And the more truly any persons have been devoted to God themselves, the more active and exemplary they have been in making him known to others[o].

And what can be such a source of encouragement to yourselves? There is nothing like this to encourage you *to pray*: "the goodness of God is revealed on purpose to lead you to repentance[p]", and to animate your petitions at the throne of Grace[q]. And what can so embolden you *to trust in* God? Were you to contemplate nothing but his power, you might be filled with dread, rather than with confidence: but when you consider his goodness also, your hopes of mercy are strengthened, and you are led to commit yourselves to his fatherly protection[r]. Surely also there cannot be found any stronger inducement *to serve* him. "What shall I render unto the Lord?" is the natural question that must arise in the bosom of every one that feels his obligations to the Lord[m]: and if we did not "serve the Lord with gladness and joyfulness of heart for the abundance of the mercies" he has vouchsafed unto us, we should be filled with self-reproach, and be constrained to acknowledge ourselves deserving of the heaviest condemnation[s].]

Behold now, what matter here is,

1. For reproof—

[Is it not surprising, that, surrounded as we are with the mercies and loving-kindness of our God, we should be so insensible of all his goodness?— — —Let us blush for our ingratitude: let us strive henceforth so to "think of his loving-kindness," that we may say with David, "Thy loving-kindness, O God, is ever before mine eyes[t]:" yea, "let us praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men[u]." If we will but contemplate his *acts*, we shall soon become acquainted with his *love*[x].]

2. For encouragement—

[What do we mean by entertaining hard thoughts of God, or doubting his willingness to accept and bless us? His very nature is love[y]; and all his acts, though often misapprehended by us, are love also. Be it so, our sins have so abounded, that we seem almost beyond the reach of mercy: "but where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound[z]." And

[n] Ps. lxxviii. 2—7. [o] Ps. cxlv. 1—8. [p] Rom. ii. 4.
[q] Ps. li. 1. & lxix. 16, 17. [r] Ps. xxxvi. 7. [m] Ps. lxiii. 3.
[s] Deut. xxviii. 45, 47. [t] Ps. xxvi. 3. & xlviii. 9.
[u] Ps. cvii. 8, 15, 21, 31. [x] ib. ver. 43. [y] 1 John iv. 8.
[z] Rom. v. 20.

And if we will only go and "remind him of his loving-kindnesses which have been ever of old," we shall find that our plea is absolutely irresistible[a].]

[a] Ps. xxv. 6, 7, 11.

DXLII.

THE LOVE OF GOD TOWARDS HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. lxiii. 9. *In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.*

AMONGST those who have the Gospel fully opened to them, the history of the Jews must of necessity be familiar. Yet, however familiar it be to our minds, we need to have it frequently brought to our remembrance, since it exhibits with unrivalled clearness the dispensations of God's providence, and shadows forth with most astonishing exactness the wonders of his grace. The words which we have just read may be considered as a kind of summary of that history: in them are recorded God's tender compassion towards his people, whilst they were groaning under the yoke of Pharaoh; the means he used for their deliverance, by sending an angel, the Angel of the Covenant, his only dear Son, to bring them forth from Egypt; the success of those means in their complete redemption; and his continued care over them during the whole period of their sojourning in the wilderness. We might, not unprofitably, enter into a particular consideration of all these events, and take occasion from them to adore the power and faithfulness of Jehovah: but we propose rather to turn your attention to the mercies vouchsafed unto ourselves; and we would lead you to notice,

I. His tender compassion towards ourselves—

[Even in our unconverted state he looks on us with an eye of pity[a], longing for our return[b], and following us with invitations to accept of mercy[c]. But the very instant we begin

[a] Compare Exod. iii. 7. with Hos. xi. 7—9. [b] Jer. xiii. 27.
[c] Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

begin to feel the burthen of our sins, and to mourn over them, all the tenderest emotions of love are excited in his breast, and he flies, as it were, to raise us from our depression, and to comfort us in our sorrows[d]. Every sigh and groan enters into his ears, and every tear is treasured up in his vials[e].

We pass over his sympathy with us under all our subsequent trials, because that will be more advantageously noticed in another part of our discourse; and we proceed to notice,]

II. The wonderful deliverance he vouchsafes unto us—

[The Angel by whom God saved the Church in the wilderness, is the same as he still employs for our salvation[f]; even "the Messenger of the Covenant[g]," the Lord Jesus Christ[h]. He has sent that divine person to "redeem us," not by power only, but by price, even the inestimable price of his own blood[i]. And to what must we ascribe this stupendous gift? Was it bestowed on account of any merit in us, either that God had already seen, or that he foresaw as hereafter to exist? No: it was to "his love and pity" alone that we are indebted, either for his first gift of his Son to redeem the world, or for his application of that redemption to our souls. "He loved us, because he would love us[k];" and to his free and sovereign grace must all the glory be ascribed, by all the hosts of his redeemed for ever and ever.

But our obligation to his love and pity are best seen in,]

III. The continued care with which he watches over us—

[Exceeding beautiful is the description given of his attention to his people in the wilderness[l]: and justly may it be considered as illustrating the care which he takes of us[m]. There is not any state in which his eye is not upon us for good. Are we assaulted by persecution or temptation? he stands ready to succour us with grace sufficient for us, and to make us "more than conquerors" over all. Every returning want will he supply[n], and "keep us by his power through faith unto everlasting salvation[o]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are the Lord's only in name and profession—

[Such, alas! were the great mass of those who came out of

[d] Luke xv. 20.
[e] See that beautiful representation of his love, Jer. xxxi. 18,20.
[f] Compare Exod. iii. 1—6, 13, 14. with Acts vii. 30—34.
[g] Mal. iii. 1. [h] 1 Cor. x. 9. [i] 1 Pet. i. 18,19. Rev. v. 9.
[k] Deut. vii. 7, 8. [l] Deut. xxxii. 10—12.
[m] See Isai. xl. 11. & xlvi. 3, 4. [n] Isai. xxxiii. 16. & xli. 17,18.
[o] 1 Pet. i. 5.

of Egypt; and therefore they were left to perish in the wilderness. This is particularly specified in the words following our text[p]: and the same fate will befall us also, if we do not give up ourselves to God in a way of holy obedience[q].]

2. Those who are his in deed and in truth—

[Two things we wish you ever to bear in mind; namely, your privileges, and your obligations. As for your privileges, what tongue can ever declare them, what finite understanding can ever fully apprehend them? O remember "the Rock whence ye are hewn, and the hole of the pit whence ye are digged," and let the wonders of Redemption be your meditation day and night. Consider too your obligations. "What manner of people ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness!" Surely, "having been bought with so great a price, ye should ever glorify your God with your body and your spirit, which are his[r]."]

[p] ver. 10. [q] Exod. xxiii. 20, 21. with Matt. vii. 21.
[r] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

DXLIII.

IMPERFECTION OF OUR BEST SERVICES.

Isai. lxiv. 6. *We are all as an unclean thing; and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.*

HUMILITY is that grace which is most suited to our condition as fallen creatures; and, that we may be assisted in the pursuit of it, God has graciously given us, not only promises for our encouragement, but patterns for our imitation, and models for our use. We cannot have any more instructive pattern than that which is exhibited in the repenting Publican, or in the returning Prodigal. Of models, that which David has left us, in the Fifty-first Psalm, is perhaps the most distinguished, and of most general utility: but that which is contained in this, and part of the preceding, chapter, excepting only some few expressions, is almost equally applicable to the Christian world. The whole of it is a prayer drawn up by the prophet for the use of the Jews, when they should be in captivity in Babylon. We shall not enter into it at large, but shall confine our attention to the passage which we have just read, which most justly describes our state before God,

I. In

I. In general terms—

There were many things considered as unclean under the Jewish dispensation: and whosoever touched them, was deemed unclean; and, till he had been purified according to the Law, he was kept both from the house of God and from all his fellow-creatures, lest he should communicate to others the defilement which he had contracted. Hence, when the prophet says, "We are all as an unclean thing," he must be understood to say, that we are,

1. Unclean in ourselves—

[Who can look inward for one moment, and not confess this melancholy truth?———]

2. Defiling to others—

[The whole of our intercourse with each other tends to foster some vile affection, some "earthly, sensual, or devilish" inclination———]

3. In a state of separation from God and his people—

[We have by nature no delight in God: we are averse to his service, his worship, his people: our "carnal minds are enmity against him," and against every thing that leads to him, or sets him before our eyes——— We "say continually in our hearts, Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."]

Wretched as our state appears from this representation, the prophet sets it forth in a far more humiliating view,

II. By a particular comparison—

In the former clause of the text the prophet speaks of us as we are *on the whole:* but in the latter part he speaks of our "*righteousnesses*" *only:* and these he compares to a leprous garment, which by God's express command was to be consigned to the flames. The truth of this comparison appears, in that all our best deeds are,

1. Defective—

[If we measure them by a standard of our own, we may discern no flaw in them: but the perfect Law of God is that by which they must be tried: and where has there been one action of our lives that has fully come up to that standard?——— We are required to love God with all our heart,

heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength; and our neighbour as ourselves: but what duty that we ever performed to God or man will stand this test?———— Hence we must confess, that every thing we have done has been impure in the sight of God———]

2. Mixed with sin—

[Pride and self-righteousness cleave to us as long as we are in an unconverted state; and the more exemplary our conduct is, the more it calls forth, and seems to justify, those hateful propensities. Let the most moral person look into his own heart, and see whether, instead of being filled with self-lothing and self-abhorrence on account of his defects, he do not find a self-preference and self-complacency arising in his heart, and prompting him to say, like the elated Pharisee, "I thank thee, O God, that I am not as other men." Now this is a fly, that would render the most precious ointment offensive[a]. While such a disposition as this is harboured in our hearts, we, and all that we do, must be hateful in the sight of God, and render us fit only to be cast, as most abhorred objects, into the fire of hell[b].]

This subject may be IMPROVED for,

1. Our conviction—

[We are very backward to acknowledge ourselves so depraved as we really are. But this declaration of God is sufficient to humble the proudest heart. It is not atrocious sinners only that are thus vile, but "*all*," all without exception. Nor are our worst actions only thus defiled, but *all*, even our best; "*all* our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Let all then, without exception, humble themselves as "unclean[c]," and "vile[d]," and altogether destitute of any thing that is good[e].]

2. Our direction—

[Our own righteousness must be wholly renounced; and all of us must enter into the kingdom of heaven on the very same footing as publicans and harlots. This is humiliating to our proud nature; but it must be done: for, if it would be unseemly

[a] Eccl. x. 1.

[b] See Lev. xiii. 47—58. but especially ver. 55, where it was appointed, that though the plague had not spread, or changed its colour, yet if it had eaten off the knap from the cloth, the cloth was to be burned, because it was "*fret inward*." So, though the whole conversation of a man be not polluted, or even *visibly* bad in any part, yet if there be an inward disposition that is depraved, our great High Priest, when he shall inspect our hearts, will certainly pronounce us leprous, and execute the law upon us.

[c] Isai. vi. 5. [d] Job xl. 4. [e] Rom. vii. 18.

unseemly to introduce to an earthly monarch his bride clothed in "filthy rags," much more would it be so to present our souls to the heavenly Bridegroom clad in such polluted garments as ours. St. Paul himself felt the necessity of a better righteousness than his own[f]; and, if ever we would find acceptance with God, we must seek it altogether through the righteousness of Christ.]

3. Our comfort—

[We need not be dejected on account of the foregoing representation; since there is a righteousness offered to us in the Gospel, even "the righteousness of Christ, which is unto all, and upon all them that believe[g]." This is commensurate with our wants: it is absolutely perfect; and it was wrought out by Him[h], in order that we might be clad in it, and "that the shame of our nakedness might not appear[i]." Rejoice therefore all ye who are conscious of your own depravity, and pray to God that "Christ may be made righteousness unto you[k];" and that you, both in time and in eternity, may glory in him as "THE LORD YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS[l]."]

[f] Phil. iii. 9. [g] Rom. iii. 22. [h] Dan. ix. 24. [i] Rev. iii. 18.
[k] 1 Cor. i. 30. [l] Jer. xxiii. 6.

DXLIV.

DANGER OF DISREGARDING GOD.

Isai. lxv. 12—14. *Because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not: therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit.*

IN every age, and every place, God is the same: he is the Governor of the universe, and expects obedience from all his creatures, and will deal with them in a way of approbation or displeasure, according as they conduct themselves towards him. Whatever his people do, either in a way of obedience or of disobedience, he will notice it, in order to a suitable retribution; taking into the account every thing which, on the one hand, may either extenuate or aggravate the guilt of the disobedient, or, on the other hand,

hand, enhance or detract from the services of the obedient. This is evident in the passage before us, where he specifies his own unwearied kindness to his people as greatly aggravating the guilt of their neglect, and as forming a ground for his executing the heavier judgments upon them.

Let us consider,

I. The evil laid to their charge—

This was indeed heinous beyond measure: for, notwithstanding all the remonstrances of successive Prophets whom God sent to warn them of their guilt, "they forsook the Lord, and forgot his holy mountain," where they ought to have worshipped him; and "offered sacrifices to a whole troop" of worthless idols. In this respect *we*, through mercy, stand on higher ground than they. Yet, though free from gross idolatry, *we have acted altogether on the same rebellious principle as they*, in that,

1. We have followed, every one of us, our own evil ways—

[We have not all acted in precisely the same way: some have run into the grosser sins of drunkenness and uncleanness, whilst others have been more decorous in their habits of life: but we have all neglected to choose the things wherein God did delight, and have "chosen the things wherein he delighted not." To fear him, to love him, to serve him, to glorify him, *these* are the things which God would have approved: but how far have they been from being the objects of our choice!——— A life of carelessness and indifference, of worldliness and vanity; and of an idolatrous attachment to the things of time and sense, *this* is hateful in the sight of God: and this has been our habit, from our youth up even until now———]

This we have done notwithstanding God's incessant endeavours to reclaim us—

[How constantly has he spoken to us in his blessed word! With what warnings, and invitations, and promises, and expostulations has he followed us all our days! How often has he spoken to us in his providential dealings, and how often by his Holy Spirit in our own consciences! yet all in vain: we have turned a deaf ear to every admonition; "we have pulled away the shoulder, we have refused to return"——— Our Lord may well complain of us, "How often would I

have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!"

Now all this has greatly aggravated our guilt. As our blessed Lord said of the Jews, "If I had not come unto them and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin," so it may be said of us: indeed of us it may be said in a peculiar manner, because of the plainness and fidelity with which the whole counsel of God has been for so many years declared unto you: verily we have in that respect been distinguished as Capernaum of old; and may expect to be distinguished also like that city in our punishment, if we continue to abuse the privileges with which we are so highly favoured.]

From the evil which they committed, we proceed to notice,

II. The judgments denounced against them—

Under the Jewish dispensation, the commands of God were enforced with temporal rewards and punishments: but to us he holds forth rather such as are spiritual and eternal. Certain it is that God will put a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not.

He will do it in this world—

[The servants of God, as to external things, may be, and for the most part are, in a state inferior to others: nevertheless they have in reality an infinitely better portion than the greatest or happiest of God's enemies. "The very blessings of his enemies are cursed to them," so that "in the midst of their sufficiency they are in straits;" but the Lord's people have even their afflictions sanctified to them, so that they are enabled to "glory in their tribulations," and "take pleasure in their distresses." They have "meat to eat which the world knows not of:" and so refreshing are their draughts from the Fountain of living waters, that "they never thirst again" for the polluted streams which this world affords. Their minds are tranquil and at ease, whilst "the wicked are like the troubled sea which cannot rest;" *they* live in higher regions, where the storms and tempests of this lower world can scarcely reach; and enjoy in the light of God's countenance a very foretaste of heaven itself———]

He will do it in the world to come—

[Oh! who can conceive how different from that of the ungodly will be the lot of God's servants *there?* The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus will serve to give us some idea

idea of it. *Here* the Rich Man's state appeared to have in it all that was desirable, whilst the destitution of Lazarus was extreme: but how different their condition *there!* the one banqueting at the table of his Lord, and "drinking of the rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand;" the other wanting "a drop of water to cool his tongue!" the one exalted in glory on his Saviour's throne, and filled with a complete fruition of his God; the other "weeping and wailing, and gnashing his teeth," in anguish, which no words can utter, no imagination can conceive! Verily the words of my text will *then* have their full accomplishment; and *then* shall every soul understand what is comprehended in this sentence, "Behold, my servants shall eat; but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink; but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart; but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who disregard the warnings of their God—

[What excuse have you for this rebellious conduct? Is there any thing unreasonable in his commands? Is he not worthy to be feared, and loved, and served, and honoured? and would not your own happiness be promoted by conforming to his will? — — — Or have you any doubt whether there be a day of future retribution, when "he will give to every man according to his works?" You cannot doubt of this. Why then will you not lay to heart the warnings and the exhortations which he sends to you from time to time? I pray you think of the judgments here denounced against those who are disobedient to his word; and "flee, whilst yet ye may flee, to the refuge that is set before you" — — —]

2. Those who obey him in spirit and in truth—

[We cannot but observe with what peculiar delight God contemplates the happiness of his obedient servants. No less than four times does he repeat the words, "Behold, my servants;" as though he had said, "These are the people whom I delight to honour; and the whole universe shall see, that they are above all others, the blessed of the Lord." To you then I say, Think of the blessings which are here accorded to you; and labour night and day to secure them. In particular, consult the Sacred Records, and see what those things are in which your God delights. Does he delight to honour his only dear Son? Let your whole soul engage in this blessed work, looking to him for all that you want, "receiving every thing out of his fulness," and devoting your-

selves in body, soul, and spirit, to his service. Does God delight in holiness? Seek it in its utmost heights, that ye may "be holy as he is holy, and perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."]

DXLV.

GOD DELIGHTS TO COMFORT HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. lxvi. 10—13. *Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.*

IT is the peculiar character of the Lord's people, that they enter into the concerns of the Church, rejoicing in her prosperity, and lamenting whatever tends to her dishonour. For both these exercises of mind there is occasion in every place and in every age. If but one soul be added to the Church, it is a ground of joy even to the angels in heaven, and much more to those whose hands are strengthened by every such accession: on the other hand, the low state of the Church must of necessity fill every pious soul with grief and shame. But there is a time approaching, when the grounds of joy will greatly preponderate, when there will be a vast increase of glory to the Church, when innumerable multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles shall flock to her standard, and "her peace shall flow down like a river." It is of this period that the prophet is speaking, both in this and the preceding chapter: and so sudden will be its arrival, that it will seem as if "a nation were born in a day." To this period we should look forward with joy: and whatever occasions there may be for sorrow on account of existing circumstances, the prospect of such a glorious event should fill us with heavenly consolation.

That

That we may enter more fully into the exhortation in our text, we shall set before you,

I. A general view of the consolations which God has prepared for his people—

God delights in the character of a Comforter: he calls himself "The Comforter of all them that are cast down:" yea, each Person of the ever-blessed Trinity is expressly designated by this title: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort[a]:" The Lord Jesus is "the Consolation of Israel[b]:" and the Holy Spirit is yet more particularly made known to us as "The Comforter, (that *other* Comforter,) whom the Father will send to us in Christ's name[c]." And well is God set forth under this character, since he has prepared most abundant and "everlasting consolation" for us,

1. In the work and offices of his Son—

[What is there which fallen man can want, that is not treasured up for us in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved? "Christ is of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption[d]:" he is a *Priest*, on purpose to make atonement for us; a *Prophet*, on purpose to teach us by his word and spirit; a *King*, on purpose that he may rule over us and in us. In a word, there is "all fulness treasured up in Him[e]," in order that we may "receive out of His fulness grace for grace[f]." Hence the Apostle, assuming it as an obvious and acknowledged truth, urges it as a motive to universal love; "If there be *any consolation in Christ*, fulfil ye my joy," being all in perfect unity with each other[g].]

2. In the fulness and stability of his covenant—

[The "everlasting covenant," which from all eternity was made between the Father and the Son, was "ordered in all things and sure[h]." There is not any thing we desire, but there is the most abundant provision made for it by many and repeated promises, all of which he has confirmed to us by the most solemn oath, Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! Jehovah covenants; Jehovah swears! And wherefore does he so condescend to the infirmities of men? Is it to guard against a ver-

[a] 2 Cor. i. 3. [b] Luke ii. 25. [c] John xiv. 16, 26.
[d] 1 Cor. i. 30. [e] Col. i. 19. [f] John i. 16.
[g] Phil. ii. 1, 2. [h] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

a versatility of mind on his part? No; but to *comfort us* under our fears of his displeasure: "being willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, he confirmed it with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, *we might have strong consolation*, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before us[l]."]

3. In the richness and variety of his ordinances—

[God does not merely *permit* us to approach him, but has *commanded* us to come to his footstool, and to make known to him our requests in every possible situation and circumstance of life. He has appointed ordinances, public, private, social, assuring us, that, if we "draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to us," and "do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think." These ordinances are beautifully represented in our text as "breasts of consolation, which we may suck and be satisfied with, yea, from which we may milk out and be delighted with an abundance of glory." And here let me ask the people of the Lord, Whether God has not "spread for them, as for his people of old, a table in the wilderness;" and abundantly blessed to them the provisions of his House? whether "their weary souls have not been satiated, and their sorrowful souls replenished?" whether in these seasons "light has not often arisen to them in obscurity, and their darkness been made as the noon day?" and especially, whether at the table of the Lord, when they have been feeding on the body and blood of their crucified Saviour, they have not often found "his body to be *bread indeed*, and his blood to be *drink indeed?*" Yes; in reading his word, and in communion with him, the soul enjoys "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined[k];" and those who have most frequented "his banqueting house," have most found "his banner over them to be love[l]."]

4. In the gifts and trials of his Ministers—

[Various are the gifts with which the Lord endows his servants[m], that he may thereby adapt his word to the necessities of all[n]: and the particular commission which he gives to every one of them is, "*Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people; speak ye comfortably to* Jerusalem[o]:" "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; your God will come and save you[p]." He chooses to speak to us by men, rather than by angels; because they, by their own experience of the bitterness of sin and of the consolations of the Gospel, are able

[l] Heb. vi. 17, 18. [k] Isai. xxv. 6. [l] Cant. ii. 3, 4.
[m] 1 Cor. xii. 8—11. [n] Eph. iv. 11—13. [o] Isai. xl. 1, 2.
[p] Isai. xxxv. 3, 4. See also, particularly in this view, Isai. lxi. 1—3.

able to testify of "the things which they have heard, and seen, and handled[q];" and can speak with tenderness and compassion to others, from a sense of their own great and manifold infirmities[r]. It usually happens too, that those Ministers who are made most useful to the Church of God have themselves been brought into deep waters, and been subjected to many trials; God "giving them thereby the tongue of the learned," and qualifying them to "speak a word in season" to persons in all the varied circumstances of life[s]. To this St. Paul ascribes both the trials and consolations which had so greatly abounded in his experience: "God," says he, "comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in *any* trouble with the same comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; or, whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation[t]."]

But, if we would justly appreciate the consolations prepared for us, let us take,

II. A more particular view of them, as represented in the image before us—

The images in the holy Scriptures have this distinguished excellence, that they bring home to the comprehension and the feelings of every man truths which are at once the most exalted and most interesting that can be presented to our view. It is quite erroneous to suppose, that, because an image is common, it is therefore unfit to be a vehicle of Divine truth: we should rather say, it is therefore the most proper for illustrating such things as are analogous to it. The idea of a little infant sucking at his mother's breast, and borne in her arms, on her side, or dandled on her knees, may seem unworthy to express the love of Jehovah towards his people; yet will we assert, that the whole creation does not present an image that will more adequately convey this sentiment to our minds. It suggests to us,

1. His attention to our wants—

[How great and manifold are the wants of a little child; no one of which he himself is able to supply! but his mother provides for every one of them, and anticipates them even before

[q] 1 John i. 1. [r] Heb. v. 1, 2. [s] Isai. l. 4.

[t] 2 Cor. i. 4—6. This passage is worthy of very particular attention, especially in the view in which it is here adduced.

before he is brought into the world. In like manner, the number of our wants is only equalled by the extent of our helplessness: we are not of ourselves able to do any thing good, nor "to speak a good word," no, nor even "to think a good thought." But our God has promised "to supply all our wants, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus[u]." "He knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him;" and he has engaged, that "though the lions may lack and suffer hunger, they who fear him shall want no manner of thing that is good:" he will give them "grace to help them in every time of need," and "his grace shall be sufficient for them."]

2. His sympathy with us in our troubles—

[Through diseases of various kinds, and accidents almost innumerable, the days of infancy afford much scope for the exercise of parental tenderness and affection. And where is the mother whose bowels have not frequently yearned over her afflicted offspring? How has the sudden cry of her infant pierced her soul, even as with a sword! Yet is this but a very faint image of the tenderness and compassion of our God. In reference to his people of old, it is said, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel[x];" and, "in all their afflictions he was afflicted[y]." So now, if any presume to injure them, God says, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye[z]." Our Divine Master identifies himself with his people, and regards every thing that is done to them, whether good or evil, as done unto himself: if they be persecuted, it is HE that is smitten[a]; or if they have kindness ministered unto them, it is HE that is relieved[b]. One member of the body does not more participate the feelings of the rest, than *he* does the trials and troubles of his redeemed people: indeed, he submitted to be "made in all things like unto them, on purpose that he might, as our faithful and compassionate High Priest, be stimulated, as it were, from his own experience, to pity and relieve his tempted people[c].]

3. His forbearance towards us in our perverseness—

[Few things perhaps are more trying to the temper than the untowardness of a perverse child: it requires all the love of a parent to support it, when it is great and of long continuance. But what parent ever had to endure a thousandth part of the perverseness which our God has seen in us; seen too in the midst of all his kindness? No one can read the history of Israel in the wilderness without being amazed at the

[u] Phil. iv. 19. [x] Judg. x. 16. [y] Isai. lxiii. 9.
[z] Zech. ii. 8. [a] Acts ix. 4. [b] Matt. xxv. 45.
[c] Heb. ii. 17,18. & iv. 15.

the multitude of their provocations, and at the patience with which "God suffered their manners forty years:" yet this is a just representation of human nature, in every place, and every age. Of the very best amongst us it may be said, that "he falleth seven times a day:" yea, "in many things we offend all." But God "does not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities:" on the contrary, "he spareth, when we deserve punishment;" "he keepeth mercy for thousands," who, alas! would soon cast it away; "he forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin;" and, if constrained to chasten us with the rod, he "does not suffer his whole displeasure to arise," but chastises in mercy only, and "does not utterly take away his loving-kindness from us."]

4. His affectionate endearments—

[It is well known with what delight a mother will "bear her" infant in her arms, and "dandle him on her knees:" and it should seem as if this were an extravagant representation of the Saviour's love to us: but he "bare his people, and carried them all the days of old:" even "as an eagle beareth on her wings" her unfledged offspring, so does he now "carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead them that are with young." It is, if we may so speak, a delight to him to "manifest himself to them" in the most endearing manner; to "lift up the light of his countenance upon them;" to "kiss them with the kisses of his lips," and to "shed abroad his love in their hearts by the Holy Ghost." He accounts them "his jewels," and "his peculiar treasure;" and "rejoices over them, to do them good" in every possible way. Not all the endearments of the tenderest mother can exceed the exercises of his mind towards us, as described by an inspired prophet: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save: he will *rejoice over thee with joy*: he will *rest in his love*: he will *joy over thee with singing*[d]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are strangers to our Jerusalem—

[It is generally thought amongst you, that there is no happiness in religion. But, I would ask, Where else is it to be found? You may go and search for it through the whole creation in vain: "The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not in me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof[e]:" it is in Christ only that the nations of the earth either are, or can be, blessed. If it be said, that religion has its peculiar trials; we acknowledge readily, that it has: but if it bring trials, it affords comforts also to counter-balance them: indeed the very word "comfort"

[d] Zeph. iii. 17. [e] Job xxviii. 14, 15.

"comfort" necessarily implies in it somewhat of previous pain or trouble. Sorrow for sin, the mortification of our in-dwelling corruptions, the enduring of contempt and reproach for Christ's sake, may all be considered as painful in themselves; but none ever took "this yoke" upon them, but they found it, after a season, both "light and easy;" and have been enabled at last to take pleasure, and to glory, in those very trials, which appear so formidable to unenlightened men[f]. But if you wish to be happy and yet hold fast your sins, *that* is impossible: as the tenderest mother in the universe cannot make her child happy, whilst he is under the influence of perverse and wicked dispositions, so neither can God himself make you happy whilst you are living in disobedience to any one of his commands. There must of necessity be a difference between a duteous and a disobedient child: to the one a wise mother will impart many testimonies of her regard, which she is constrained to withhold from the other. So it is with God: he manifests himself to his faithful people as he does not unto the world: and if we would but walk before him as obedient children, he would give a foretaste of heaven itself, in the light of his countenance, and in the tokens of his love. Were this duly considered, we should no longer be content to live as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," but should seek to become "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."]

2. Those who love and mourn for her—

[Your concern for the welfare of the Church is a hopeful evidence that you have received the word of God in truth; for it is the characteristic mark of all true saints, that "they prefer Jerusalem above their chief joy." But, whilst you are concerned about the Church at large, you must not forget, that you yourselves constitute a part of that Church, and that the other members of this great family will rejoice or mourn, according as you walk worthy, or unworthy, of your high calling. The comfort of God's children depends, not only on the manifestations of his favour, but on the state of the Church around them. What tears did David shed on account of those who kept not God's law! and how did Paul feel, as it were, all the pangs of travel renewed in his soul, when the misconduct of some in the Galatian Church caused him to stand in doubt of them! On the other hand, no words could express the joy which John, the beloved disciple, felt, "when he saw his children walk in truth." Be watchful then over your whole spirit and conduct, and see that they be such as become the Gospel of Christ. On this the honour of your heavenly Parent depends: on this also depend the manifestations of his love to your souls. Only seek that God may be glorified in

[f] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

in you; and then shall thanksgivings abound towards him on your account: your own "peace also shall flow down like a river," and the prosperity of Zion be greatly increased.]

DXLVI.

THE JEWS TO CONVERT THE GENTILES.

Isai. lxvi. 18—20.[a] *It shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them; and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the House of the Lord.*

WHEN we look upon the world around us, and consider how utterly God is neglected and despised by the great mass of his intelligent creatures, and that successive generations of immortal Beings are swept away without any knowledge of a Saviour, or any hope of beholding the face of God in peace, we are ready to say with the prophet, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep night and day[a]," for the dishonour done to my God, and for the miseries which, like a relentless deluge, are overwhelming the whole earth! It is, however, a consolation to know, that this state of things is drawing to a close, and that a new era is about to appear, when the darkness which now covers the earth shall be dispelled, and righteousness reign where sin has hitherto maintained an undisputed sway. The prospect of this period, which is now fast approaching, and speedily to commence, was the great support of the Church under the distresses to which she was reduced in the Babylonish captivity; and it still forms the richest source of consolation to all who have any zeal for God, or any concern for the welfare

[a] Jer. ix. 1.

welfare of mankind. So impressed was the prophet Isaiah with his views of this mighty change, that he could scarcely speak of any thing else: or, if he did speak of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, or of the blessings treasured up for them by the introduction of the Messiah's kingdom, he constantly interwove in his statements such grand and glorious expressions, as could not fail of carrying forward the minds of his readers to this blessed time, when "new heavens, and a new earth, were to be created[b]," and the universal empire of righteousness to be established throughout the earth. Of this period he speaks in the words before us; which will lead me to set before you,

I. God's purpose respecting the Gentile world—

"It shall come to pass, that I will gather all nations, and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory." This is the fixed purpose of Jehovah; a purpose,

1. Proclaimed by all the Prophets—

[Respecting "the gathering of the nations" to Christ, there is but one voice, from the time of Abraham to the close of the sacred canon. Christ is that "Seed in whom all the nations of the earth are to be blessed[c];" that "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of all people shall be[d]." "The utmost ends of the earth are promised to Him as his possession[e]:" "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall do him service[f]:" "from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof shall his name be great among the Gentiles[g];" and all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ[h]."

But there is a peculiarity in this prophecy which must not be overlooked. God has in the great work of Redemption revealed his glory to mankind. In that he has shewn how "mercy and truth could meet together, and righteousness and peace could kiss each other[i]." There he has proclaimed his name as "merciful and gracious, and yet as not by any means clearing the guilty[k]." It is this harmony of his perfections that chiefly constitutes his glory. Previous to the revelation of his Gospel, the highest archangel could not have conceived how

[b] ver. 22. [c] Gen. xviii. 18. [d] Gen. xlix. 10.
[e] Ps. ii. 8. [f] Ps. lxxii. 11. [g] Mal. i. 11.
[h] Rev. xi. 15. [i] Ps. lxxxv. 10. [k] Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

how God could be "a just God, and yet a Saviour[l]." But in Christ Jesus the whole difficulty is solved. By sending him into the world, and laying our iniquities on him, the fullest demands of justice are satisfied, and a way is opened for the richest exercise of mercy towards a guilty world: the truth of God which was pledged for the execution of all his threatenings, is preserved; and yet may the sinner, who was obnoxious to them, be absolved, and be restored to the enjoyment of his forfeited inheritance. This is the mystery in which all the glory of the Godhead shines; and which all the nations of the earth shall in due time have revealed to them in its meridian splendor. This is fully declared by the prophet in a preceding chapter: "Arise, shine! for thy light is come; and *the glory of the Lord* is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and *his glory shall be seen upon thee.* And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising[m]." And the prophet Habakkuk also marks it with peculiar precision: "The earth," says he, "shall be filled with *the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*"]

2. Assuredly to be fulfilled in its season—

[Were we to judge by present appearances, we should say, that such an event could never be accomplished. But so we should have thought respecting the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, and from Babylon; and of the establishment of Christianity by the Ministry of a few poor fishermen. But it is not in this way that we are to form our judgment or our expectations. We have only to ask ourselves; "Has God promised these things? and, Is he able to perform them?" These points being ascertained, we are as sure of the event, as if we already saw it before our eyes: for "God is not a man that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent." *In fact, the prophet did, as it were, behold it actually accomplishing in his day:* he saw the Gentile world "flying to Christ, as doves to their windows;" and he called upon the Church to rejoice in it: "Break forth into joy; sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord *hath comforted* his people; he *hath redeemed* Jerusalem: the Lord *hath made bare* his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations: and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God[n]."]

If the purpose itself fill us with wonder, we shall be no less amazed when we are informed of,

II. The

[l] Isai. xlv. 21. [m] Isai. lx. 1—3. & lxii. 2.
[n] ibid. lii. 9, 10. with lx. 4, 8.

II. The instruments by whom he will effect it—

It was by the Ministry of Jews that God was pleased to bring in the first-fruits of the Gentiles; and by the Ministry of the Jews will he gather in the whole harvest. In this passage the prophet distinctly states who are the persons ordained to this work—

[They are here designated as "those who have escaped unto the nations:" and who these are there can be no doubt. They are the remnant of the Jewish nation dispersed throughout the world[o]. What the particular places are amongst which they are scattered, it is not necessary to determine: it is sufficient to know, that they are countries widely distant from each other, and countries "which have not heard of the Redeemer's fame, or seen his glory." Amongst these nations shall "an ensign be raised" by the Jews, whom "*God has sent to them*" *for this express purpose:* and it is by their Ministry that God will diffuse the knowledge of salvation amongst them. The language here used is clear and decisive: "I will send those that escape of them," that is, the Jews; "*I will send them unto the nations;* and THEY SHALL DECLARE MY GLORY AMONG THE GENTILES." How little has the Christian world adverted to this prophecy! How little have any of us, when perhaps we have been pouring contempt upon the Jews, recollected for what glorious purposes they are reserved, and what a blessing they are ordained to be to the whole world! Be it known unto you, Brethren, that THE JEWS are the persons ordained of God to "declare his glory among the Gentiles." They themselves are at present as unconscious of the end for which they are so dispersed, as the Gentiles are amongst whom they are scattered: but they shall nevertheless infallibly execute the office for which they are designed. The prophet Micah says of them, "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men[p]." "Now the clouds know not the end for which God sends them over the face of the earth; nor is the dew aware of the purpose which God has designed it to effect: but both the one and the other infallibly and effectually execute the purposes of heaven, and cause the parched ground to send forth its fruits. So shall the Jews do, when once the light has burst in upon their minds; and "the receiving of them into the Christian Church shall be as life from the dead" to the whole world[pp].]

2. The

[o] See Isai. iv. 2 [p] Mic. v. 7. [pp] Rom. xi. 15.

2. The success that shall attend their labours—

[As the effects of rain are rapid on the whole vegetable creation, so shall the fruits of their Ministry among the Gentiles be rapid and abundant; "They shall bring all their Gentile Brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, saith the Lord; as the Children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the House of the Lord." The meat-offering consisted of fine flour unleavened, and mingled with oil: oil also was poured upon it, and frankincense put thereon[q]. Of how many myriads of particles an handful of flour consisted, we know not: but it very fitly represents the congregated masses of Believers that shall then be presented to the Lord, all of them pure and unleavened, and all of them sanctified by the Holy Ghost. This is the very construction which St. Paul himself puts upon the text, which he represents as *in part* fulfilled in himself, who was, in a more peculiar manner than any other of the Apostles, "the Minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, *ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost*[r]". Nor let it be thought that this is a fanciful interpretation: for the prophet himself, in a foregoing chapter, represents the converts as "a cloud[s]," which, whether it be understood of dust, or of rain, conveys precisely the same idea as we have just suggested from the meat-offering; and the Psalmist also places the matter in exactly the same view, when he says, that "the handful of corn cast by them upon the tops of the mountains shall grow up as the woods of Lebanon, and as the piles of grass upon the earth[t]." Indeed the prophet himself uses in another place a still stronger figure: for he represents the Gentile world at that period as "flowing (contrary to nature), like a mighty river, *up* to the Lord's House, when established upon the top of the highest mountains[u]"; so powerful, so harmonious, so universal shall be the concourse of the Gentiles to Mount Zion, in consequence of God's blessing on the labours of their Jewish instructors.]

SEE then,

1. Of what importance the conversion of the Jews is to the whole world!

[Many individuals may be, and are, converted from among the Gentiles by the labours of Gentile Teachers; and we do well to exert ourselves in every possible way for the diffusion of Christian knowledge amongst them. But though we may reap the first-fruits, the gathering in of the harvest is reserved

[q] Lev. ii. 1—6. [r] Rom. xv. 16. [s] Isai. lx. 8.
[t] Ps. lxxii. 16. [u] Isai. ii. 2.

reserved for Labourers of the Jewish community. There is a passage which is supposed to establish a directly opposite opinion: but the passage itself is quite misunderstood. It is said, that "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in[x]:" and from thence it is supposed, that the whole of the Gentiles must be converted, before that blindness is removed from the Jewish people. But in another part of the same chapter it is said, that, as the diminishing of the Jews was the means of enriching the Gentile world, much more shall their fulness be so; the receiving of the Jews into the Church being the signal for, and the means of, a spiritual resurrection to the whole Gentile world[y]. The "fulness" in both places imports, not the *complete* in-gathering of all, but *the commencement* of that mighty work. It will *begin* among the Gentiles (as it has indeed already begun); and then it will proceed among the Jews, who shall carry it on, and perfect it, among the Gentiles: *As soon as the Jews determinately rejected the Gospel*, it was preached unto the Gentiles[z]: and as soon as the Gentiles begin in any considerable numbers to embrace the faith of Christ, we hope and believe, that God will make known himself unto the Jews, and make them the instruments of converting the whole world. If then we have any concern for the Gentile world, we should labour with all our might (in prayer, and in the use of all suitable means) to impart the Gospel to the Jews; that so they may be ready to execute the work to which they are ordained, and for which they are fitted beyond any other people upon the face of the earth. As having their own Scriptures (upon which ours are founded) with them, and as understanding the languages of the different countries wherein they dwell, they are ready at any moment to preach the Gospel to those around them, as soon as ever "the veil shall be taken from their own hearts." Being acquainted with their own Scriptures, they will unlock the mysteries contained in ours, the very instant that "the key of knowledge" is put into their hands. And their conversion will itself be such a confirmation of prophecy, that all will be ready to receive their word, and to obey the Gospel delivered by them. Let us therefore arise to our long-neglected duty; and "neither rest ourselves, nor give rest unto our God," till he call in his banished Children, and make Jerusalem once more a praise in the earth[a].]

2. What are those points to which we must particularly attend in our own conversion—

[The Jews are to "declare God's glory among the Gentiles," and to offer them up as an holy offering unto the Lord." These

[x] Rom. xi. 25. [y] Rom. xi. 12, 15. [z] Acts. xiii. 45—47.
[a] Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

These are the two essential points of conversion; and if either be wanting in us, we can never behold the face of God in peace. We must have light in our understandings, and holiness in our hearts. The first thing in the old creation was light; and that also is the first in the new: "God, who created light out of darkness, must shine into our hearts, to give us the light of *the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*[b]." This is not a mere speculative knowledge; but such a view of God's glory, as leads immediately to a willing surrender of our souls to him, "as a living sacrifice[c]." The two must go together, as the root and the fruit. They are absolutely inseparable. We never can devote ourselves unreservedly to God, till we feel our obligations to him for all the wonders of redeeming love: but if once we have right views of Christ, "we shall immediately purify ourselves, even as he is pure[d]." Let us then never be satisfied, till "Christ is fully revealed in our hearts,[e]" and till we so "behold his glory as to be changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord[f]."

[b] 2 Cor. iv. 6. [c] Rom. xii. 1. 2 Cor. viii. 5.
[d] 1 John iii. 3. [e] Gal. i. 16. [f] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

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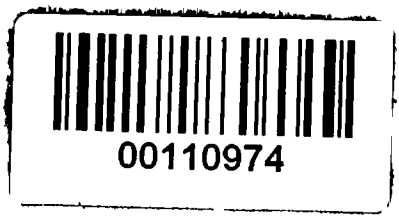
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